

OPPORTUNITIES AND BARRIERS TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF EFFECTIVE INCLUSIVE PRACTICE IN BANGLADESHI PRIMARY SCHOOL

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ABSTRACT

The government of Bangladesh is committed to ensure education for all according to their constitutional commitment and the National Education Policy (2010). Inclusive education is an important issue to ensure education for all. Inclusive education refers to all children their neighbouring mainstream school including children with disabilities fulfilling requirements according to their needs which can ensure their teaching-learning environment (Knowles, 2018). Several international declaration and policies such as the Salamanca statement (1994) help to understand the importance of this. The principles of social justice (Rawls, 1971 cited in Benjamin and Emejulu, 2012) which aims to promote social harmony, equality, and respect for all can help the educators to implement inclusive practice minimizing inequalities and injustice. Researchers have shown in their studies that like other developing countries, Bangladesh is facing challenges to implementing inclusive practice effectively. This study aims to explore the opportunities and barriers to the effective implementation of inclusive practice in Bangladeshi primary schools. Four teachers and two administrative officers took part in the qualitative research study, where semi-structured interviews were used to collect data. A thematic approach was used to analysis the data. The study found that different policies and initiatives such as the National Education Policy, SLIP and UPEP project, supplying free books and stipend for all students are some of the opportunities for inclusion deployed by the state. On the other hand, poverty, lack of social awareness, lack of skilled teachers and educators, the rigidity of curriculum and lack of proper infrastructural development are the barriers to inclusion in the context of Bangladesh. The need for specific initiatives and increasing the provided supports as a measure of the effective implementation of the inclusive practice is required for positive change to be embedded in schools.

Keyword: Opportunity, Barrier, Inclusive Education, Promote, Policy, Change.

INTRODUCTION

Inclusive practice means that the equitable access and participation in school activities of all children in a mainstream school that can ensure in their education (Farrell, 2004). Knowles (2018) states that providing additional support to children with special needs with regular students in a school to ensure a teaching-learning environment which can help in their learning is known as inclusive practice. Booth and Ainscow (2011) state that inclusion can

help to increase the participation of all children with adults. In order to effective inclusion, school is responsible to provide more support to children who have come from a disadvantaged and poor family in considering their needs.

Ensuring equity with fairness is an important concern, such that the education of all learners is seen as having equal importance. According to Westwood (2013), inclusive education has been conceptualized in many different ways based on the ideological and rhetorical level. Inclusive education depends on the awareness as well as the attitude of community people. In an inclusive society, people are accepted, honoured and valued individually among themselves and peoples are not divided depending on their background such ethnic minority, poverty or their other conditions. However, it can be concluded from the above statement that Inclusive practice is needed to provide for every child in education system considering their needs of learning and achieving knowledge.

Statement of the problem

Bangladesh is situated in South Asia. The primary education system of Bangladesh is one of the largest in the world. Considering this commitment and constitutional guarantee, the government of Bangladesh has developed Primary Education Development Programme (PEDP), currently is running PEDP-4. Through this programme, the government has taken different initiatives to implement effective inclusive practice in primary schools. For this strong commitment, net children's enrolment rate is being increased to 97.94% where is the girls' is 98.27% (MoPME, 2017).

McAuliffe (2018) and (Allan 2013) noted in their studies that there are many challenges to implementing effective inclusive practice such as: structural, environmental and attitudinal that are known as barriers to inclusion. Bangladesh also faces several challenges to the implementation of an effective inclusive practice. Currently, all the children are not in school, 53% have disabilities (Ahsan et al., 2013). However, MOPME has taken several initiatives to ensure inclusive practice in primary schools such as short training on inclusive education to the Head teachers and administrative officers related to the primary education (Ahsan et al., 2015). According to this policy "Education for All" is also the curriculum vision of Bangladesh that helps to promote inclusive practice. So, implementing inclusive education is a policy priority in my country. To teach all school-aged children in a school including the children with disabilities by fulfilling the requirements according to the needs help to promote their adopting and learning. Effective inclusive practice helps to reduce the inequalities of children's learning outcomes which help to decrease the dropout rate.

Significance of the study

The findings of this study can be of significance and benefits to the educators, teachers and students those are with disabilities and their families. Teachers can develop their knowledge and understanding of the barriers and opportunities which can help to promote inclusive practice in schools. This and the knowledge of educators' own experiences can also help to develop other schools and the wider community, those are related with the primary schools to ensure effective inclusive practice. Finally, this study can be of interest and benefits to the research community which added insights relating to barriers and opportunities providing more recent information and will contribute to the research literature on this topic on Bangladesh perspective.

Purpose of the study

The findings of the proposed study may help to recognize the impact of effective inclusive practice such as the opportunities and barriers in primary schools in the Bangladeshi context. The findings of this study will also help the teachers to develop their knowledge and understanding on inclusive education. Thus, the knowledge and understating will help to enrich their own experience to the effective implementation of inclusive practice in Bangladeshi primary schools.

Rationale of the study

Considering the background, the government of Bangladesh through the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education has developed the Primary Education Development Programme (PEDP). Through this programme, Directorate of

Primary Education (DPE) has taken different initiatives to implement effective inclusive practice in primary schools. Different studies on inclusive education have been conducted particularly in Bangladesh and other countries (Shevlin, Winter and Flynn, 2013; Islam, Salauddin and Ahsan, 2016; Malak et al., 2014; Ahmed, Sharma, and Deppeler, 2014; Malak, 2013). The findings of the proposed study will enrich the existing findings by providing recent perspectives on the opportunities and barriers of inclusive education in the Bangladesh.

Research Question

The study forwarded the subsequent research question:

What are the opportunities and barriers to effective inclusive practice in Bangladeshi primary schools?

Research Objective

The study intended to explore head the following aims:

- i) The educators' experiences, educational qualification, understanding and perceptions of inclusive education.
- ii) The challenges to the effective implementation of inclusive practice in Bangladeshi primary schools.
- iii) The opportunities for the effective implementation of inclusive practice in Bangladeshi primary schools.
- iv) Recommendations for minimizing the barriers and maximizing the opportunities to the effective implementation of inclusive practice in Bangladeshi primary schools.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The principles of the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994 cited in Barret et al., 2015) help to understand inclusive education. According to this statement, schools are responsible to include all children in learning without considering their family background or their other conditions such as physical, social, emotional, intellectual and linguistic. This statement helps to understand the necessity of social justice and children rights which can promote inclusive practice. The development of school capacity is significant focusing on diverse children and also children who come from an ethnic minority and disadvantaged family. In a review of Irish schools in a study by Rose et al. (2010 cited in Shevlin, Winter and Flynn, 2013) suggests that teachers should have professional knowledge to teach in an inclusive school, specially to the children with special needs. Although this study was conducted in different country, it is relevant to my proposed study because it outlines the benefits of inclusive practice in Bangladesh, which is the focus of my proposed study, to provide both the context and content for inclusive practice.

Islam, Salauddin and Ahsan (2016) conducted a study in Bangladeshi primary schools to find out the implementation of inclusive practice in a regular classroom. Researchers noted that teachers are not able to teach children with disabilities in their classroom with regular students because they are not trained with practicalities of accommodating children with disabilities in a regular classroom. Islam, Salauddin and Ahsan's (2016) study is relevant to my proposed study because it outlines focus on barriers to inclusion in classroom practice in the Bangladeshi context. The implementation of inclusive practice in education requires the identification of challenges and opportunities. Malek et al. (2014) noted that teachers in mainstream schools in Bangladesh are not positive towards inclusion. This means that the education system is not planning ahead to accommodate all children including those are with disabilities in mainstream schools. Malek et al. (2014) in their article find out that short training courses have already been provided to all head teachers and administrative officers on inclusive education which helps to ensure positive attitudes in their enrolment of children with disabilities in regular schools. Malek et al.'s (2014) study is relevant to my proposed study because it outlines a focus on teachers' attitude to ensure the acceptance of children with special needs in the classroom.

Ahmed and Mullick (2014) note that the effectiveness of inclusive practice is related to the infrastructural development of the schools. The authors find out that community members, parents and school authority, perceived a need for the improvement of school furniture, classroom, toilets and whole school friendly approach for children with disabilities. This means school structure and facilities are needed to develop and that include all children including those are with special needs and to ensure that these structure and furniture are user-friendly. Ahmed and Mullick's (2013) study is relevant to my proposed study because it outlines focus on school structure and furniture in Bangladeshi primary schools which are related to inclusive practice. Kawser, Ahmed and Ahmed (2016) in their

study of inclusive practice in Bangladesh, identified several barriers to inclusive practice, such as negative social attitudes towards inclusion, lack of awareness among people, accessibility issues, limited resources, lack of teachers' knowledge to promote inclusive practice due to insufficient proper training on inclusion, institutional power distance and lack of team work. The findings of my proposed study will extend the findings of Kawser, Ahmed and Ahmed's (2016) study by adding insights relating to barriers but also to much better analysis.

A recent study(Ahsan and Sharma, 2018) is an attempt to investigate pre-service teachers' preparedness for inclusive education. Researchers found that the government of Bangladesh has taken different initiatives to promote inclusive practice. But pre- service teachers' attitudes are not so positive towards inclusion of students who have high support needs, such as Braille, sign language or developing an individualised academic programme. Several curriculum reforms are also needed to promote inclusive practice. Another recent study(Bushra et al., 2018) explores the multiple dimension of inclusive education in Bangladeshi primary schools. Bushra et al. (2018) concluded that a significant number of children with disabilities enrolled in primary schools but gradually decreased their participation and they could not be promoted in upper classes. Thus, the ultimate result was a high percentage of students dropping out from the school. The research also note that school authorities have tried to ensure quality learning environment for the children with disabilities but the infrastructural and psycho- physical environment are not suitable to implement inclusive education. In most schools, teaching processes are unfriendly in meaningful participation and learning for children with disabilities. This study is relevant to my study because it outlines focus on infrastructural, psycho-physical environment and teaching processes which effect on the learning environment of effective inclusive practices in the primary schools of Bangladesh. The impact of proper strategies in teaching-learning process for inclusive education has been well established. Das (2013) conducted a study in the southern part of Bangladesh on teaching- learning strategies in the classroom. He concluded that teachers are accountable for inclusive practice but the using strategies in classrooms are not significant for children with disabilities. He also notes that teachers are not skilled enough using special techniques and strategies in the classroom for children with disabilities.

In another recent study, Ahmed, Sharma and Deppeler (2014) found that younger and highly educated teachers are more welcoming in including children with disabilities in regular classrooms. Moreover, highly experienced teachers are more interested to teach children with special needs in regular classrooms. This study is relevant to my study because it focused on the benefits of implementing inclusive education in Bangladesh. Inclusive education is related to the lack of sufficient support, lack of infrastructural development, and lack of knowledge and training in the classroom of teachers. Mullick et al. (2012) conducted a study in Bangladesh collecting data from assistant teachers, head teachers, school management committee and upazila education officer. This study identified that the negative attitude of parents and community, students' lack of acceptance, teachers' resistance, insufficient support, and physical environment are the challenge to effective implementation of inclusive education.

In another research, Sarker and Davey (2009) found a large number of indigenous children cannot complete primary education in the north-western part of Bangladesh. They note some challenges to the inclusion of indigenous children that are poverty and child labour, lack of awareness towards education, seasonal migration of their families and language difficulties. The findings of Sarker and Davey (2009) is related to my study because it focused on the inclusion of indigenous children in Bangladeshi primary schools. The findings of my proposed study will extend Sarker and Davey's (2009) study providing more recent information of these kinds of children to inclusion in Bangladesh.

Yadav et al. (2015) conducted a study in regular schools in Gurgaon district of Haryana district in India, which has a very similar educational framework to Bangladesh, and concluded that teachers need professional development, training on special education and long-term support to teach children with disabilities in regular classrooms. This study is relevant to my proposed study because it outlines the benefits of inclusive practice in regular schools.

Ahsan and Burnip (2007) conducted a study on inclusive education in Bangladesh. They show in their article that Bangladesh has already signed all the international declarations on inclusive education and enacted several laws and declarations to promote inclusive practice in the education system, and that a lack of resources and proper initiatives are the barriers to inclusive practice. The authors note that about 89% of school-age children with disabilities are not in education in Bangladesh whereas in developed countries almost all children are in education. Ahsan and Burnip (2007). They suggested that different initiatives such as the development of link programmes between special education and mainstream schools; development of special education system in mainstream schools; development of model schools on inclusive education so that other schools can follow to promote the inclusive practice and increase

interagency and inter-ministerial collaboration, and can promote the inclusive practice in Bangladesh. This study is relevant to my study because it outlines focus on laws and declarations, barriers and further initiatives to inclusive practice in Bangladeshi primary schools. The findings of my proposed study will extend the findings of Ahsan and Burnip (2007) study by providing more recent perspectives to promote the inclusive practice in the Bangladeshi context.

In a study on Inclusive education in Bangladesh, Ahmed (2015) notes that Bangladesh has already enacted different policies, acts and programmes to promote education for all including with children with disabilities in the mainstream schools. The Ministry of Primary and Mass Education (MoPME) under the Primary Education Development Programme-3 (PEDP3) takes initiatives to include all children including children with special needs; diverse group of children; children those are with special needs or those are with disabilities; children from ethnic communities and disadvantaged children in the regular education system. Ahmed (2015) notes in his study that the school managing committee is not positive towards inclusion. The poor parents of children with special needs are not conscious about their children's education and they send their disabled children to earn money begging on the street. Many parents do not know that children with disabilities could learn in their neighbouring schools. Some parents do not wish that their children sitting next to children with disabilities or children from sex workers. Teachers do not have sufficient training and do not get sufficient resources to teach children with disabilities in a regular classroom. Ahmed's (2015) study is relevant to my proposed study because it focuses on different policies and initiatives have been taken by the government of Bangladesh to implement inclusive practice.

A study by Šiška and Habib (2013) in Bangladesh is an attempt to investigate general peoples' views and perspectives on the education of children with special needs and children with disabilities. It helps to understand the barriers to the implantation of inclusive practice in primary education. Researchers note that due to the lack of literacy and skills, o parents could not identify their children's impairment and because of this, they failed to take early proper treatment. However, the lack of interaction with the child causes a literacy delay. They also found that in 2008, only 16% of school structures are user-friendly to the children with special needs. For this reason, a large number of children in Bangladesh are deprived of proper education. Šiška and Habib (2013) suggest that increasing social awareness of the importance of education will help to promote inclusion in schools. This research is relevant to my proposed study which outlines focused on the barriers and recommendation to the inclusion of children with disabilities in the primary education system.

As a developing country, Bangladesh is struggling to implement effective inclusive practice which is necessary to ensure education for all. In a study, Malak (2013) notes that maximum teachers do not show positive attitudes to include students with special needs in regular classrooms. Malak (2013) also notes that teachers have no clear conceptions and they do not know how to include and teach the student with the disability in a regular classroom. Children with special needs are not manageable in a regular classroom because they are aggressive, they do not want to sit in a place and they might be hit, other students. Maximum classrooms are large in size and they could not give special attention to the student with special needs. They did not expect any special needs student in their class because they think this may be engaged themselves to extra workloads. Children with special needs cannot pass the examination because of the rigidity of the curriculum. The materials are not sufficient to teach the student with special needs in a regular classroom. This study is relevant to my study because it outlines focus on teachers' response to include the student with special needs in regular classrooms which effect on inclusion and learning environment of inclusive practice in primary schools in Bangladesh.

In a research (Rahman and Islam, 2009) shows that in 1990 the government of Bangladesh passed the compulsory education law for children up to the class five and education for all also stated in the Article 17 of the constitution. Researchers in their article note that Bangladesh faces different challenges such as student drop-out, less quality education, low expending, unanswerable to community and absence of child-friendly schools to ensure education for children with special needs. The absence of child-friendly school is also a challenge to ensure education for all. Although Rahman and Islam (2009) research were conducted to investigate the challenges to ensure education for all, it is relevant to my study because it outlines the benefits of inclusive practice in Bangladesh, which is the focus of my study, to provide both content and context for inclusive practice.

In a study, Rugmini and Salam (2014) found that the primary education in Bangladesh is universal, compulsory, free and inclusive but a large number of school-aged children those are with disabilities do not include in education. People believe that children with disabilities are not capable of learning and living independent lives. Researchers

also note that insufficient support of appropriate teaching-learning materials; lack of suitable transport and infrastructural barriers; vision and hearing based pedagogy; rigidity of evaluation system; lack of essential facilities and absence of advanced technology in the education system are the main barriers to inclusive practice. This research is related to my proposed study because it focused on the inclusion of children with disabilities in Bangladeshi primary schools. The findings of my proposed study will extend Rugmini and Salam (2014) study providing more recent information on children with disabilities to inclusion in Bangladesh.

Das (2011) in a study notes that, children with special needs in the regular education system are increasing day by day. But Bangladesh faces several challenges to ensure effective inclusive practice. Insufficient appropriate teaching-learning materials to teach the student with disabilities is one of the main barriers to inclusion. Lack of appropriate teachers' training and lack of experience; lack of quality school structures and furniture to the children with special needs and insufficient resources that are related to teaching the student with disabilities are the barriers to effective inclusive practice in mainstream primary schools in Bangladesh. This study is related to my proposed study because it outlines focus on infrastructure; teaching-learning materials and processes which affect the learning environment of effective inclusive practices in the primary schools of Bangladesh.

METHODOLOGY

Research approach

According to Punch (2005, quoted in Bell, 2014), qualitative researchers use non-numerical and unstructured data through research questions which are normal at the begin and turn out to be increasingly focused as the investigation progress. Bryman (2016) argues that qualitative research usually gives special importance on descriptive opinion in collecting and analysing data than quantification. On the other hand, Quantitative researchers 'use techniques that are likely to produce quantified and, if possible, generalizable conclusions' (Bell, 2014, p. 17). Moreover, Menter et al. (2011) point out that gathering quantitative data researchers can be able to analyse general examples but cannot offer to investigate participants' understanding and experiences. So, according to the purpose, the researcher will conduct a qualitative approach to investigate the participants' understanding and experiences on inclusive practice.

Questionnaire and Interview

Menter et al. (2011) note that researchers use questionnaires to analyse attitudes, values, beliefs and past behaviour, and as a data collection tool, it is capable of collecting information quickly. Though researchers face difficulties to design questionnaires, it helps them to collect a large amount of data within a short period of time in covering large number of samples. Questionnaires help to complete data analysis rapidly.

According to Menter et al. (2011), interviews allow participants to express their own understanding. This helps to identify the actual point to give importance to people's action and to put light on people's motivation, attitudes, and rationale. Interviews allow researchers to change the questions if it is needed to find out relevant findings. Interviews permit active discussion on the research topic which helps to focus on relevant issues. Interviewees can express their descriptive opinions that help to find out more about the factors to take action. A questionnaire is designed by researchers whereas interviews allow probing questions to clarify the questions that help to understand and improve these questions. 'The strength of qualitative approaches is that they account for and include difference - ideologically, epistemologically, methodologically-and most importantly, humanly. They do not attempt to eliminate what cannot be discounted. They do not attempt to simplify what cannot be simplified. Thus, it is precisely because case study includes paradoxes and acknowledges that there are no simple answers, that it can and should qualify as the gold standard' (Shields, 2007, p. 12).

According to Menter et al. (2011), interviews may need much time and may be expensive. Data assembling may be hampered such as interviews can be hampered personality difference, power dynamics and gender and so on. The experience and skills of interviewers can minimize these factors. An interview is taken through the interaction with the interviewer and the respondents which means that face to face discussions on same definite topics may have difficulties. Experience and skills of the interviewer can overcome these issues. Menter et al. (2011) also argue that interviewer can use an unacknowledged qualitative method such as telephone interviewing or internet interviewing. Researchers can make a close and harmonious relationship with the interviewees that encourage frankness.

Silverman (2005) suggests that researchers in qualitative approach can face trouble achieving reliability. The researcher interprets the collected data and this is why the results may be biased.

Data collection tool

This study is used a semi-structured interview as the data collection tool. According to Menter et al. (2011), collection tool semi-structured interview is a popular method because of it is flexible that can help the interviewers to know people's thinking and experiences in a specific way by asking supplementary questions to the interviewers. Maxwell (2005) suggests that the interview is often a well organised and logical way of understanding someone's outlook. I asked the questions which were enquiring, investigative and analytical, focusing on the opportunities available and the barriers facing the effective implementation of inclusive practice in Bangladeshi primary schools. This study will permit simplification of the interviewees' perspectives about the barriers and opportunities to ensure inclusive practice in primary schools.

According to Gall et al. (2007), interviews in qualitative research are three types. Among these, informal conversation interview which depends totally on the spontaneous generation of questions and participants may not understand clearly that they are interviewed. Another is the general interview guide approach that includes the same outline of a set of topics to be investigated with every respondent. The standardised open-ended interview requires the same set of questions being interviewed to every respondent to minimize the possibility of bias.

The interview associated with open-ended questions that were asked to the interviewees. The questions were assembled different kinds of literature on inclusive education, and from the experience on the primary education system in Bangladesh, Data were collected according to the research plan. Interviews have lasted between 20 – 30 minutes, were carried out individually in a mobile call. Interviews were mobile call recorded, transcribed as soon as after the interviews and participant consent.

Sample

According to Menter et al. (2011), the sample which was used for semi-structured interviews should consider the characteristics of the group being studied. Denscombe (2010) recommends that semi-structured interview sampling as purposive because it is favoured to suit the purpose of the research. Moreover, Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) proposed five key factors in choosing population as a sample. These include the sample size; the parameters and representativeness of the sample; the sampling strategy that would be used; access to the sample and the type of research being undertaken.

The sample group aimed to study was upazila education officer and primary teachers who had already experienced working in mainstream primary schools to promote inclusive practice. Therefore, the sample consisted of an assistant teacher, head teacher, AUEO and UEO who have experiences in doing this type of work. According to Cohen et al. (2011), a convenience sample was used in the research made up of two assistant teachers, two head teachers, one AUEO and one UEO from within SadarUpazila, Kishoreganj district in Bangladesh.

Data analysis

Thematic analysis is the most popular method for qualitative research. With the permission of respondents, the interviews were recorded and then transcribed. The similar codes across transcripts were used for the same themes, including new codes when new points came up that were not embedded by existing points. Then similar themes were the points into the same group (Creswell, 2015). The key topics and the answers were given by the participants could be then recognised that came out from the data analysis. This data was reviewed in terms of the expanse to which they were responded to the research questions.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Theme 1: Experiences of the Participants

This section looked at questions which explored the education and experiences of the participants working in primary school. Respondents' experiences working in primary education and their academic qualification are presented in the following table.

Table on questions 1-3 of interview schedule

Participant	Age (Years)	Gender	Service length (Years)	Education of the educators	Length of time in present working place (Years)
A	38	Male	9	Masters' degree	9
B	36	Male	11	Bachelor degree	11
C	36	Female	10	Masters' degree	1
D	47	Female	19	Masters' degree	16
E	47	Male	18	Masters' degree	2
F	51	Male	18	Masters' degree	1

Practitioners and educators age, educational qualification and working experience are related to inclusive practice. Ahmed, Sharma, and Deppeler (2014) in their research found that younger and highly educated teachers are more welcoming in including children with disabilities in regular classrooms. Moreover, highly experienced teachers are more interested to teach children with special needs in regular classrooms.

Theme 2: Understanding and perceptions of inclusive education

All participants discussed that inclusive education is a system where all children learn together in the same curriculum.

One participant stated

“Inclusive education is a system to ensure quality education for all children in a class with regular students without considering their diversity, religion- colour, wealth-poverty of their parents, boys- girls, children with special needs and disadvantaged children in an environment and the same time. For example teaching children with special needs, street children, indigenous children and disadvantaged children in a class with the regular students.” (Respondent C)

Other participant presented

“All children in a class without considering their gender, diversity, religion, colour, profession and financial condition of their parents ensure to teach in the same curriculum is known as inclusive education. For example, teaching children from rich and poor family as well as children with disabilities considering their needs in a regular classroom.” (Respondent B)

The participants' responses provide knowledge of inclusion. But the responses do not highlight on fulfilling to the requirements disadvantaged children according to their needs of learning and achieving knowledge. These results are relevant to the statement on inclusive education that schools are responsible to include all children in learning without considering their family background or their other conditions such as their disability, minority, emotion and language (UNESCO, 1994 cited in Barret et al 2015). This is the declaration of the Salamanca Statement on inclusive education which helps to understand the necessity of social justice and children rights. This understanding helps to promote inclusive practice focusing on diverse children and children from an ethnic minority and disadvantaged family. Booth and Ainscow (2011) similarly present that inclusion refers to provide support to the

diverse children in considering their backgrounds, interests, experiences, knowledge and skills to increase the participation of all children with adults to the increasing participation of children in education system.

The answer from respondents in relation to provided teaching-learning materials and motivating the parents of children with special needs and disadvantaged family to inspire them towards inclusion. Participants also focused on giving their special attention to the children with special needs in a classroom.

“I also provide school dress, writing pad, pen and pencil according to the needs of children whose parents are not able to provide these materials because of their poverty.” (Respondent D)

“I talk to the parents of children with special needs or parents of children with disabilities so that they can able to realise the importance to their children’s education and enrol them in my school.” (Respondent A)

“I try to motivate the teachers to take initiative so that the hard of hearing students in taking their seat near to the teacher to hear clearly the teachers’ voice.” (Respondent F)

Question delivered qualitative data on the inclusive practice in the area where participants are working. The answers from respondents in relation to given support in fulfilling the needs to the children with special needs and children those are come from disadvantaged family to continue and ensure their quality learning in schools with regular students. For example,

“In my school, the inclusive practice has slightly implemented because the school cannot fulfil the needs of children with special needs and disadvantaged children. A number of parents are poor in the catchment area of my school and poor parents are not interested to their children’s education and they think that their children can help them in doing works.” (Respondent C)

“Teachers are not able to give special attention to the students with special needs because of the large size class. All teachers are not positive towards inclusion. Moreover, lack of teachers’ training, lack of sufficient teaching-learning materials and the rigidity of the curriculum are the main challenges to the implementation of inclusive education.” (Respondent E)

The responses provide the participants’ perceptions towards inclusion and parents’ attitudes to their children’s learning. All participants stated that parents are not aware of their children’s education and two participants expressed their negative attitude towards inclusion. These findings correspond to those found by Malak (2013) who noted that teachers have no clear conceptions how to include and teach the student with the disability in a regular classroom. Teachers cannot manage the children with special needs in a regular classroom. Maximum classrooms are large in size and they could not give special attention to the student with special needs. They did not expect any special needs student in their class because they think this may be engaged themselves to extra workloads. Rahman and Islam (2009) in a study shown that a large number of children with special needs, children from an ethnic group and from a poor family cannot achieve minimum competency because their parents are not serious about the quality education for their children and ultimately the student will drop-out from the school. Parents think that children with disabilities are not capable of learning and living independent lives (Rugmini and Salam, 2014). Das (2011) in a study notes that though Bangladesh faces several challenges to ensure inclusive practice, children with special needs in the regular education system is increasing day by day.

Theme 3: Challenges of implementing inclusive education

All participants argued that they tried to implement effective inclusive education in school but they were facing different barriers in practice. All participants said that lack of proper teachers’ training and lack of social awareness are the main barriers to the effective inclusive practice in Bangladesh. Respondents noted

“Lack of social awareness people is not positive towards inclusion in the catchment area of my school. Lack of proper training teachers does not know how to teach children with special needs in a regular classroom.” (Respondent D)

“Lack of proper teachers’ training on inclusive education and peoples’ negative attitude to inclusion in a regular classroom are the main challenges to the effective inclusive practice.” (Respondent E)

Five respondents among six said that lack of appropriate teaching-learning materials and lack of parents' consciousness to their children's education are the challenge towards inclusion in primary school. One participant said

"There have no proper teaching-learning materials in my school to teach children with disabilities and parents in the catchment area of my school are not conscious of their children's education.(Respondent B)

Another participant noted

"Lack of awareness, parents in the catchment area of my school think that education will not be profitable for their children." (Respondent E)

Four respondents said that the large size of the classroom, lack of infrastructural development and lack of monitoring officers' training on inclusion are the challenges to the implementation of inclusive education in primary school. Respondents noted

"Furniture and infrastructure are not suitable to the children with disabilities. Due to the large size of class teacher in my school cannot give special attention to the children with special needs."(Respondent A)

"Primary education-related administrative and monitoring officers cannot provide proper instructions due to their lack of sufficient knowledge on effective inclusive education. In my school, a large size classroom is another main challenge to implement effective inclusive practice in my school."(Respondent D)

Three respondents noted that poverty, the rigidity of curriculum, lack of sufficient financial support to the school authority towards inclusion and extra-departmental workload are the challenge to the effective implementation of inclusive education. For example,

"Poverty is the main challenge to implement inclusive education because poor parents engage their children in doing agricultural work that helps them by earning money. Lack of sufficient financial support to implement an effective inclusive practice, the school cannot fulfil the requirements of the students with special needs."(Respondent B)

"Children with special needs cannot pass in the examination due to the rigidity of curriculum. Teachers and education related administrative officers are engaged in extra-departmental works."(Respondent C)

The findings from the responses of the challenges to the effective inclusive practice in primary schools are similar to the findings by Ahmed and Mullick (2013) that community members, head teachers and classroom teachers, perceived a need for the improvement of school furniture, classroom and whole school friendly approach for children with special needs. Kawser, Ahmed and Ahmed (2016) in a study in Bangladesh, identified several barriers to inclusive practice which are negative social attitudes towards inclusion, lack of awareness among people, accessibility issues, limited resources, lack of teachers' knowledge to promote inclusive practice due to insufficient proper training on inclusion, institutional power distance and lack of teamwork. Ahsan and Sharma (2018) in a study shown that pre-service teachers' attitudes are not so positive towards the inclusion of students who have high support needs, such as Braille, sign language or developing an individualised academic programme. Several curriculum reforms are also needed to promote inclusive practice. Das (2013) notes that teachers are positive to the effective implementation of inclusive education but they are not skilled enough using special techniques and strategies in the classroom for children with disabilities.

Theme 4: Opportunities to implement inclusive education

Participant responses from qualitative data show that different policies and initiatives help to promote inclusive education in primary schools. All respondents noted that a short training on inclusive education has already been provided to the head teachers and primary education-related administrative officers but they felt that the training is not detailed enough to teach more inclusively in the classroom. Financial supports to the education office through Upazila Primary Education Project (UPEP) and to the schools through School Level Improvement Plan (SLIP) also help to provide different supporting materials to the students with special needs and disadvantaged students. Special stipend is also provided for the students with disabilities by the social welfare office. This was evident by the following responses:

"Financial allocation to the Upazila education office through UPEP helps to provide assistive devices according to the needs of the student with special needs. Using SLIP grant school can take initiatives to increase social awareness and also can provide supporting materials to children with special needs."(Respondent F)

“A short-term training on inclusive education has already been provided to the head teachers and administrative officers. Social welfare office provides a special stipend for the student with disabilities.”(Respondent E)

Another respondent noted

“SLIP grant helps the School authority to provide school dress, shoes, writing pad, pen and pencil according to the needs of children with disabilities and children from the poor family. Upazila Education Office also provides different types of assistive devices to the children with disabilities considering their needs such as wheelchair, hearing aids, and spectacles and needed other assistive devices using the UPEP grant.”(Respondent C)

However, one respondent noted

“The student with disabilities also gets a special stipend which is given by the social welfare ministry. As a head teacher, I have already received training for five days on inclusive education which help me to understand the inclusive education and the acquiring knowledge also help me to implement inclusive practice in my school.”(Respondent D)

Five participants have given their opinions that a few infrastructural developments such as the ramp, wash block help to increase inclusion in primary schools. For example,

“An infrastructural development in my school such as ramp can be helped the children with disabilities to move easily by using a wheelchair.”(Respondent A)

“Ramp and wash block has already been constructed in primary schools which are user-friendly to the student with disabilities.”(Respondent E)

Three participants said that different national policies and instructions, supplying free books for all students, providing multimedia and laptop as a modern teaching material and a stipend for all the primary students increase enrolment in primary schools of Bangladesh. Respondents said

“Different national policies and instructions on inclusive education such as the constitutional guarantee and the national education policy (2010), supplying free books and stipend for all students help to promote inclusive education.”(Respondent F)

“Providing a stipend for all students and using multimedia as a modern teaching-learning material help to increase students’ attendance.”(Respondent B)

The findings of opportunities for the implementation of inclusive practice from the responses concur to the findings of researchers. Malek et al. (2014) noted that short training course on inclusive education has already been provided to primary education-related administrative officers and all head teachers which helps to ensure positive attitudes in their enrolment of children with special needs in general schools. In a research Rahman and Islam (2009) note that the government of Bangladesh have passed the compulsory education law in 1990 for children up to the class five and education for all also stated in the Article 17 of the constitution. Ahsan and Mullick (2013) state that different steps such as Primary Education Stipend (PES), Reaching Out of School Children (ROSC), School Level Improvement Plan (SLIP), Upazila Level Improvement Plan (UPEP) project have been taken by the government of Bangladesh to promote inclusion in primary education.

Theme 5: Recommendations for minimising the barriers and maximising the opportunities

Responses from interviews found that different initiatives and providing supports can minimise the barriers to the implementation of inclusive practice in primary education. All the participants expressed their opinions in

qualitative interviews that increasing social awareness and providing proper training to the teachers and primary education-related administrative officers are main factors to minimise the barriers to inclusive practice. A short Training to the head teachers and educators has already been provided but they felt that the training is not detailed enough to equip them with knowledge and resources to be more confident to teach more inclusively in the classroom. For example,

“Sufficient training is needed to provide all the teachers and monitoring officers on inclusive education so that teachers can teach effectively in an inclusive classroom and monitoring officers can help the school authority to implement inclusive practice disseminating proper instructions.” (Respondent A)

“Seminars and talk shows are needed to arrange on the importance of inclusive practice that can help to increase social awareness.” (Respondent B)

“Ensuring proper training for all teachers on inclusive education is important so that teachers can know how to teach children with disabilities.” (Respondent D)

“To develop social awareness taking an initiative to broadcast different documentaries, films and dramas in electronic media and arranging the seminars, symposiums highlighted to the importance of inclusive education would be more effective towards inclusion in my school.” (Respondent C)

On the other hand, five participants said that providing teaching-learning materials and reforming curriculum can help to teach the students with disabilities. For example,

“Providing teaching-learning materials is important for inclusive practice according to the needs of children with special needs.” (Respondent B)

“Reforming the curriculum in considering the all kinds of children needs so that children with special needs able to continue their education.”(Respondent C)

Four respondents noted that School structures and furniture are needed to develop so that these would be user-friendly to the children with special needs. One respondent noted

“Developing infrastructures and furniture would be user-friendly to the children with disabilities.” (Respondent C)

Three participants presented their opinions that recruiting more teachers, providing sufficient assistive devices can help to minimise the barriers to the implementation of the inclusive practice. For example,

“Recruiting more teachers to minimise the class size so that teachers can give special attention to the children with disabilities.” (Respondent B)

“Ensuring the supply of assistive devices according to the needs of children with disabilities can help to promote inclusion.” (Respondent C)

Two respondents said that strengthening school and local authority is important to minimise the barriers. For example,

“Strengthening school authority and Upazila education office in taking a decision and providing support considering the situation to the implementation of inclusive education can minimise the barriers to inclusion.”(Responded F)

The findings to minimise the barriers and maximise the opportunities to the implementation of inclusive practice from the responses similar to the findings of researchers. Such as Ahmed and Mullick (2013) noted that the school structure and facilities were needed to develop that accommodate children with special needs mobility issues and other furniture to ensure that these structure and furniture are user friendly. Ahsan and Umesh (2018) in their recent study recommend that pre-service teachers’ attitudes are needed to be positive towards the inclusion of students who have high support needs, such as Braille, sign language or developing an individualised academic programme. Several curriculum reforms are also needed to promote inclusive practice. Yadev et al. (2015) commented that teachers need professional development, training on special education and long-term support to teach children with disabilities in regular classrooms. Ali (2014) recommends that teachers’ empowerment and proper training on

inclusive education; sufficient allocation; building awareness of society; flexibility of curriculum and proper coordination among different government offices, schools and community can help to promote inclusive practice in Bangladesh.

Key findings

One of the objectives of this research was to investigate the participants' knowledge, understanding and attitudes towards inclusive education. This study also focused on the strategies that teachers, educators, parents and community consider to be effective in addressing any potential barriers and opportunities effect of inclusive education. The findings of the study showed that teachers' initiatives, the financial condition of parents and social awareness have an impact on the implementation of an effective inclusive practice.

Through analysis the participants' responses lack of proper training to the teachers and administrative officers, lack of social awareness, lack of proper teaching-learning materials and lack of parents' consciousness to their children education, large size of the classroom, lack of infrastructural development, the poverty, the rigidity of curriculum, insufficient financial support to the school authority towards inclusion and extra-departmental workload are the barriers to the effective implementation of inclusive education.

Moreover, different national policies and instructions, supplying free books for all students, providing multimedia and laptop as a modern teaching material and a stipend for all the primary students increase enrolment in the primary education system. Provided training to the head teachers and primary education-related administrative officers, financial support to the education office through the Upazila Primary Education Plan (UPEP) and to the schools through School Level Improvement Plan (SLIP), special stipend to the students with disabilities and a few of infrastructural developments such as the ramp, wash block help to increase inclusion in primary schools.

Participants also expressed their opinions through the interview that would be minimized the barriers and maximized the opportunities to the implementation of the effective inclusive practice. According to the responses, reforming curriculum; providing appropriate training to the teachers and primary education related officers; increasing interagency collaboration; broadcasting different programs on inclusive education; increasing stakeholders' participation in school activities; developing infrastructures and furniture, strengthening school authority, providing teaching-learning materials to the needs of disadvantaged children and assistive devices to the children with disabilities; inspiring the parents of children with disabilities to their children's education and providing training to the school community help to minimize the barriers and maximize the opportunities in effective inclusive practice.

CONCLUSION

The findings of the study show that the government has taken several initiatives but like other developing countries, Bangladesh also faces different challenges to implement inclusive practice in primary schools.

The government of Bangladesh has developed different policies and taken different initiatives to promote effective inclusive practice in primary schools. The government provides free books and stipend to every student which help to inspire children and parents as well as increase the enrolment of school-aged children. Providing modern teaching-learning materials such as a laptop, multimedia and training for multimedia classroom help to increase student attendance in class. Headteachers and primary education-related administrative officers can help to understand inclusion and its importance by disseminating their knowledge to other teachers and community which they have already acquired through a short-term training on inclusive practice. Through UPEP and SLIP, Upazila education office and school can provide different assistive devices to the student with disabilities according to their needs and the social welfare office also provides a special stipend to these kinds of students which also help to promote inclusion in primary education. A few of infrastructure such as ramp and wash block which are user-friendly to the children with disabilities have been developed in the schools.

Considering the policies, initiatives and providing support, teachers and educators are trying but they face different barriers in the implementation of inclusive practice and cannot be able to implement successfully in their working areas. The findings from respondents show that most of the teachers are experienced, highly educated, having a knowledge on inclusive education and also positive towards inclusion. But they are not skilled enough to teach effectively in an inclusive class because they have no proper training on inclusive education. Teachers and administrative officers cannot give full working time to promote inclusive practice because they are engaged in

extra-departmental work which is not related to education. Peoples and school community are not positive towards inclusion. Poor parents want to engage their children in a work rather than sending them to school. Parents of children with disabilities are not interested in their children's education whereas they try to hide their children's disability. Findings show that maximum class is a large size which includes more students and teachers cannot provide special care to the student with special needs. Due to the rigidity of the curriculum, the student with special needs cannot pass the examination and thus the ultimate result they will become drop-out from the school. School structure and furniture are not suitable for student disabilities.

All participants are experienced in working primary schools and they are trying to implement inclusive education in their working area. Participants from their view of experience and knowledge, recommend that taking proper initiatives and providing more support can help to promote this. For example, increasing social awareness as well as the parents of disability, providing special training to the educators, supplying sufficient teaching-learning materials, strengthening school authority and Upazila education office, recruiting more teachers to decrease the class size, developing school structure and furniture which will be user friendly to the children with disabilities, reforming curriculum will help to practice effective inclusive education.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH, POLICY AND PRACTICE

This study explored the perception of inclusive education, the barriers and opportunities for inclusive practice from the perspective of educators. In a most recent research, Beutel et al. (2018) noted that ensuring sustainable effective inclusive practice relies on three factors. These are broader knowledge of inclusive education, proper practices of local contexts and the factors that impact on inclusive practice.

It is significant to think about possible reasons for respondent reporting on the barriers and opportunities from their experiences on the implementation of inclusive practice in primary schools. The findings show that participants are positive towards inclusion and they are struggling to implement inclusive education. Different national policies and initiatives make an opportunity to help them in doing this but they are facing different challenges. These study identified these barriers and opportunities as well as the recommendations to minimize the barriers and maximize the opportunities from the responses of participants who have already experienced themselves in implementing inclusive education in primary school. The government of Bangladesh is trying to ensure education for all according to the National Education Policy (2010) and meet MDG (Millennium Development Goal) that is converted now to SDG (Sustainable Development Goal). Bangladesh is also committed to doing this by the constitutional guarantee of the country. Implementing inclusive education is an urgent issue to ensure education for all. Considering the policies, the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education (MoPME) has taken different initiatives under the project Primary Education Development Project-3 (PEDP-3, revised programmed, MoPME, 2015). The findings of this study providing more recent perspectives on inclusive practice in Bangladesh can help to develop policies and to take initiatives in giving supports and instructions which can help promote inclusion in primary schools.

The findings of this study provide the knowledge that can identify the impact of opportunities and barriers to effective inclusive practice. The participants provided the answer of the question of the interview from the understanding and the knowledge of their own experiences. According to Malek et al. (2014), the implementation of inclusive education requires the identification of opportunities and barriers. So, the findings of this study can be of significance and benefits to the educators, teachers and students those are with disabilities and their families. Teachers can develop their knowledge and understanding the barriers and opportunities which can help to promote inclusive practice in schools. This and the knowledge of educators' own experiences can also help to develop other schools and the wider community; those are related with the primary schools to ensure effective inclusive practice.

RECOMMENDATION FOR FUTURE, POLICY AND PRACTICE

An important limitation of this research is that the sample of this study consisted of teachers and education-related administrative officers. This was small-scale study compared with research projects which respondents may not be representative of a wider community and students those were considered as the stakeholders to the related studies. The findings of this research were investigated from the 4 teachers' responses and from the two education-related officers' responses. The teachers were working in 4 schools among 141 schools in the studied area. The interview with participants was conducted only in over mobile phone, was not visited and was not talked with them face to face. As a result, the findings cannot be generalized. Further research should investigate including a number of teachers, parents, school community and students allowing comparisons with this study to be undertaken. The validity of findings could increase through further research which would help educators to understand how they can implement effective inclusive practice in Bangladeshi primary schools.

Though it is a small scale study and the findings of this research could not be generalized but the findings of this research provide useful insights to other school teachers may be encouraged to implement inclusive education. Educators should have professional knowledge to teach in an inclusive school, specially to the children with special needs (Shevlin, Winter and Flynn, 2013). The implementation of inclusive education requires the identification of opportunities and barriers (Malek et al., 2014). This study aimed to find out the knowledge and understanding of educators, the barriers and opportunities to the implementation of effective inclusive practice in primary schools in Bangladesh.

Training for educators should be included the impact of barriers and opportunities towards inclusion and the strategies to improve their attitudes in practice. According to Islam, Salauddin and Ahsan (2016) as the teachers have no practical experience of accommodating children with disabilities, they cannot emphasize inclusive education in their classroom practice. Inter-agency collaboration should be needed in the recognition of disabilities, medication properly and of strategies to support these children. School structure should be developed to accommodate children with disabilities, mobility issues and furniture should be user-friendly. This study shows that school authority needs to be strengthened so that school can provide support according to the requirement of children with disabilities and disadvantaged children. The rigidity of the curriculum should be flexible for the children with special needs. Rugmini and Salam (2014) found that children with disabilities are not capable of learning and they cannot pass the examination due to the rigidity of the curriculum. Recruiting more teachers and support staff should be a priority, along with decreasing the number of students in each class. Malak (2013) found that teachers could not give special attention to the student with special needs in a class which had many students.

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