A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF HEAD TEACHER'S ROLE FOR INCLUSION OF CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEED IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS OF BANGLADESH

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ABSTRACT

The Government of Bangladesh is placing great emphasis on ensuring an education to all marginalised including the children with special needs by initiating a range of policies and strategies. The Head Teachers as the critical player in implementing Government policies at school level are generally not fulfilling their expected role. It is intended to explore how the role of Head Teachers regarding the inclusion of special needs children is currently perceived and how it can be further developed. It is significant to know how and why the role of Head Teachers is undermined and ineffective for the successful inclusion of children with special needs.

The study is a small-scale qualitative research project. Data was collected through interviews, FGD and documents review. Three key questions guided the whole study. Participants included six Head Teachers, three Assistant Teachers and three local education officials working in a district were interviewed. Additionally, along with some important relevant documents were reviewed. An FGD with the parents of special needs children was also conducted.

It was found that despite various challenges most of the Head Teachers have positive attitudes towards the special needs children but unsure how to deal with the challenges effectively. Generally, inclusion of special needs children is being perceived as being one of physical access of physically disabled children to school. Limited understanding of the inclusion and special needs issues along with limited resources and their underdeveloped leadership role are the major hurdles that need to be addressed. More focused specialised training, enhanced funding from the Government and most importantly employing a distributed approach of leadership that includes and involves all stakeholders are considered by the study as being critical to moving practice forward.

INTRODUCTION

Although the philosophical idea of educating the special needs children in the mainstream Government Primary Schools in Bangladesh is a widely accepted notion among the Head Teachers, there is concern that it is difficult to implement because of a basic lack of understanding of the parameters involved. As inclusion is not merely a philosophy it is about practical change that must be brought about for helping the students with special needs (Azam & Mullick, 2010). In school setting, Head Teachers as school leaders are mainly responsible for bringing this change for the betterment of special needs children. This study is to explore the current role of Head Teachers regarding the inclusion of special needs children in the mainstream Government Primary Schools under the broader framework of the inclusive education policy of the Government and associated challenges. In particular, it argues for the central role of Head Teachers in promoting inclusive education and in particular children with special needs.

BACKGROUND

Failure to develop a school system, which is capable of educating all children irrespective of their ability, will not only result in educationally deprivation which will produce social and economic underclass, this in turn will undoubtedly bring about serious consequences for our society and the nation as a whole. Therefore, developing a successful inclusive school in respect of learning and participation is at the centre of all educational policies of many countries. Consequently, a series of national and international initiatives have taken place which are intended to broaden access and participation of different vulnerable groups of children including those who are perceived special need. These include World Declarations on Education for All (EFA) (UNESCO 1990), the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education (UNESCO, 1994), Dakar Framework for Action (UNESCO, 2000), the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (UN, 2006), Millennium Development Goals (MDG) (UN, 2008).

In line with the different previously mentioned international declarations and conventions, Bangladesh has undertaken a series of policy initiatives to ensure the access of all children including the special needs. The need for a universal education for all children regardless of any circumstances was first reflected in the constitution of the newly independent country in 1972. In the article 17 and 28 of the constitution, it was clearly stated how the state should provide education to all children without any bias.

As a signatory to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Jomtein and Dakar Declarations on EFA, and according to articles 17 and 28 of the constitution, it is an obligation of the state to provide quality education to all children.

Subsequently, agreeing with other international guidelines and declarations the Government of Bangladesh has initiated a series of policies and strategies to extend educational opportunities for all children. These include the Compulsory Primary education Act1990, Bangladesh Persons with Disability Welfare Act 2001 and National Education Policy 2010, Comprehensive Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) Policy2012 where the policy of inclusion has been deeply embedded. Recognition of this state obligation is reflected in the National Education Policy adopted in 2010.

Additionally, the Government has initiated different inspiring programmes such as 'food for education' which later developed into a stipend for education, free text book distribution, teaching learning materials distribution etc. which all targeted an increase in the enrolment rate and reducing dropout rate in Government Primary Schools. Encouragingly the overall enrolment rate is increasing year by year and currently it is 97.94% (GOB 2016). Despite this healthy enrolment rate, a substantial number of children from various marginalised groups such as children with special needs, ethnic groups and ultra-poor are still not engaged in their education. Among these marginalised groups, children with special needs have a unique challenge by their nature are more vulnerable than other groups. This demands extra provision over and above the stipend, textbooks and standard provision of teaching learning materials.

In this context, the Government is focusing on improving the educational situation of various marginalised and disadvantaged groups. The National Plan of Action Phase II (2003-2015) for primary education in Bangladesh included the goal that, "all primary school-age children (6-10 years) boys and girls, including all ethnic groups, disadvantaged and disabled, are enrolled and are successfully completing the primary cycle and achieving quality education" (GoB,2003 a, P. 28).

Moreover, one of the objectives of PEDP III (2011-2018), the biggest ever sector wide approach for developing primary education in Bangladesh, was also to increase primary school access, participation and completion in accordance with government's EFA and other policy commitments (GoB, 2015). However, the vision and guidelines proposed by these legislations does not guarantee the quality implementation of inclusion in school. Different literature suggests that having legitimised guidelines does not ensure practice, which is aligned with the principle of inclusive policy.

Accordingly, it is evident that the enrolment ratio is increasing including special needs children year by year in mainstream primary schools in Bangladesh. The number recorded was 81,891 in the Annual Primary School Census 2016 (APSC)(GoB,2016), but this figure does not necessarily reflect the quality implementation of inclusion. Differences in access to and outcomes from education largely depend not only on children's individual circumstances but also on the school where they go and teachers who teach them. Malak et al (2013) found in a study that the implementation of inclusive education in Bangladesh is yet at an early stage. They further opined that inclusive education policies in Bangladesh are mostly incorporated from different international declarations and conventions and seemed to be poorly understood by practitioners and class teachers within the Bangladeshi context. Ainscow (2005) explained that the development of inclusive practice is a complex phenomenon because several factors are involved with this process. He argued that the absence of a common language within the stakeholders including policy makers, teachers and community could impede the development of inclusive school culture.

Various studies suggest that there are diverse challenges including a leadership challenge that impedes the successful inclusion of special needs children in Bangladesh. Armstrong, et.al (2011) suggested that if

Bangladesh wants to make its' inclusive education to become a reality, it needs to identify and challenge exclusion both at national level and local context where it occurs. Therefore, it is justified to know the challenges and role of Head Teachers at school levels regarding the inclusion of special needs children in Bangladesh. In this perspective, this study tried to explore the role of Head Teachers in implementing the inclusive policies of the Government especially in regards of special needs children.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Initiatives and efforts taken by the Head Teachers at school level are not currently sufficient to ensure the quality inclusion of special needs children. Head Teachers as the school leader have a significant role to play for ensuring a better access and participation of special needs children in Bangladeshi Government Primary Schools. They are largely responsible for implementing the inclusive education policy of the Government. This is also reflected in the Salamanca Statement (1994) that the local authority and school head jointly play a vital role for making a school more accessible for the children with special needs. However, due to their various challenges currently most of the Head teachers are not performing enough to accomplish their role. Ahsan, Sharma & Deppler (2011) argues that there is still a lot of work to be done, as the knowledge, attitude and skills of teachers are significantly unfavourable for students with SEN (Special Educational Needs). Because of their underperformance, a vast majority of special needs children are not being well served and are in danger of exclusion. This will undermine the commitment of Bangladesh to achieve its Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) by 2030 as it was envisioned.

However, it is evident that besides different external challenges there are internal challenges that school heads need to address for successful implementation of inclusive education. Mullick, Deppler & Sharma (2012) observed in their study of leadership challenges for inclusive education in Bangladesh that Head Teachers believe they are powerless in respect of employing teachers and caregivers, devising and implementing initiatives, mobilising resources, developing professional collaboration with other schools and local organisations, developing and conducting professional development activities and getting members of the wider community involved in school support. This indicates that Head Teacher's role is surrounded by various challenges and implies that the problems reside in their interpretation of their leadership role. In this perspective, the role of Head Teacher needs to be scrutinised for furthering their performances in regards of an effective inclusion of special needs children.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The Government of Bangladesh has developed different policy initiatives in conjunction with some field level interventions to ensure the access and participation of special needs children in the Government Primary Schools. However, the success is not being reflected at school level considering the substantial efforts made by the Government. It is revealed that there is a clear gap between the theory and practice. Das & Ochiai (2012) observed that although the enrolment of disabled students in mainstream education is increasing year by year there are plenty of shortfalls and challenges in implementation mechanism for inclusion of children with disability and promotion of quality education in the mainstream. In this context, this study tried to understand the leadership role of the Head Teachers regarding the inclusion of special needs children. The study also intended to explore the challenges and further scope for enhancing their role for ensuring successful inclusion of special needs children in mainstream Government Primary Schools. It was expected that through the study, the current role of Head Teachers regarding the special needs issue will be examined and recommendations made to secure better practice.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

There are numbers of studies completed on the various challenges of inclusion in Bangladeshi Government Primary Schools but very few considered the very significant role of Head Teachers in this issue. The study is very significant for the school Heads, local education officials and the policy makers to understand the challenges that lie at school and at leadership level, which mitigate against the progress of an inclusive education in Bangladesh. The findings of the study should develop reflection in Head Teachers upon their own role and revising their current leadership practices. Also for local education officials to redesign their role and strategies in supporting the Head Teachers to ensure better inclusion of special needs children. This study is equally significant for policy makers to pay closer attention to the current leadership role of Head Teachers and accordingly restructuring their guidelines and refining intervention procedures including teachers training. A clearly defined inclusive education policy is considered as one of the key features to achieve quality education ensuring excellence for all (Azam & Mullick,2010). Finally, the findings of the study will enrich the professional knowledge of the researcher as an education official with a further insight of this issue.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What is the current understanding of the role of Head Teachers in ensuring access of special need children in Bangladeshi Government Primary Schools?
2. What more can Head Teachers do to further their role regarding the inclusion of special needs children in primary schools?
3. What are the challenges for Head Teachers in the implementation of better inclusion of special needs children?

LITERATURE REVIEW

'Special Educational Need' (SEN) children is a commonly used term within both national and international educational fields. The notion is widely used and defined differently in different national contexts. Educationists have defined the term from largely based upon their own perspectives. In the Education act of 1944, England, children were labelled by using ten categories of handicap such as blind, partially sighted, deaf, delicate, diabetic, educationally subnormal, epileptic, maladjusted, physically handicapped, speech defect (Hodkinson 2016). The phrase actual of 'SEN' was first introduced in the Warnock Report in late 1970s in England (DES, 1978). The term is usually referred to those children who have some sort of difficulties or disabilities which make learning harder for them compared with other children of the same age. Nowadays, in the context of educational provision, the term has a legal definition that refers to children's difficulty or disability, which makes their learning and access to education harder than that of their same age children.

Clause 20 of the Children and Family Act 2014 (DfE, 2014) also used the same definition that was used within the code of practice for local authorities and educational settings. The code identified four broad categories where a child or young person's needs may fall. These are; a) Communication and Interaction, b) Cognition and Learning, c) Social, mental and emotional health, d) Sensory or physical needs.

These definitions could refer to those children who have specific learning difficulties, social, emotional or mental health difficulties, sensory or physical difficulties or other medical and health issues that impede their usual progress in education. Porter (2005) argued that historically children with disability are referred to as having 'special need'. It is evident that by the above definition children are being categorised according to their disabilities or difficulties, which could result segregating children from other children at the same age.

On the other hand, Lewis (2007) regards it as an inappropriate terminology to define a distinct group of children as 'children with special need' because any child could have special or individual learning needs. A child does not necessarily have to have particular impairment or disability to be treated as children with special need. Olivier and Williams (2005) opined, 'Special needs' exist where learners need special help and support for overcoming a particular contextual or any social and individual disadvantages they face. Therefore, it requires additional or a different provision of resources. Janus et. al. (2007) identified those needs of the children, which are different from those of typical children as 'special needs'. Any child may fall under 'special need' at any time during their school career. According to Hodkinson (2016), the key difference between 'special needs' and 'SEN' is that the former does not necessarily appears as a barrier to learning. However, in relation to individual children and the implementation of Government legislation, Hodkinson (2016) envisages that, it might be very difficult to decide what learning difficulty is or is not and what counts or does not counts as a SEN.

Many argue that, the definition of the term SEN is negatively linked with a medical view of disability. In the concept of 'SEN', Terzi (2005) observes introducing a new kind of categorization rather than moving away the notion of categorizing children. In the educational field, 'SEN' is generally defined from the children's perspective, not from the context of institutional or social barriers.

Therefore, in recent years it has recognised at both national and international levels that, there is a growing need to avoid this kind of categorization of children according to their disability. So, difficulties in learning are conceptualised as for the provision of special educational needs to additional support for learning through different legislation and policy. These changes have shifted the focus from 'what is wrong with the children?' to 'what does a child need to support their learning? However, 'children with special need' is a more acceptable term as it emphasised the children first and secondly their special need or disability (BANBEIS, 2008).

In Bangladesh, the term 'Special Need Children' or 'Children with Special Need' is widely and frequently used in the education arena including all policy documents. However, in the Bangladeshi context the concept of 'Special Need Children' is slightly different in meaning as well as in phrasing. The term 'special need children' is being used to includes only six categories of children i.e. those with physically handicapped, poor

eye sight, short of hearing, problem in speech, intellectual or mental retarded and autism. It is significant that it does not include children with other learning difficulties. In the terminology, it is also noticeable that in Bangladesh the term 'Special Need Children' is widely used instead of the term 'Special Educational Need'. Thus, by definition it has narrowed down the scope of special educational need children ignoring the children with various learning difficulty especially in Bangladeshi perspective.

So, in summary, it is evident that the definition of special educational need children directly and indirectly includes almost all kind of disability in children which reduces their access to the learning facilities and learning as well as lead to special provision for their education.

Equity in education is a recent phenomenon and much discussed issue both in developed and in developing countries. For ensuring equity in education, the importance of inclusive education rightly reflected in different international education policies and frameworks like World Declarations on Education for All (EFA) (UNESCO 1990), The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education (UNESCO,1994), Dakar Framework for Action (UNESCO, 2000), the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (U N, 2006), Millennium Development Goals (UN, 2008).

In 1994, more than 92 governments and 25 international organisations met in the Salamanca, at the 'World Conferences on Special Needs Education'. The conference produced a 'framework for action' which would require all children to be accommodated in the mainstream schools regardless of their physical, intellectual, social emotional, linguistic or other conditions; according to the framework, national and local policies should accommodate the disable children to attend the local school (UNESCO,1994). In the context of previous statements, this was undeniably an important step forward.

According to Clough (1998), this multinational commitment for inclusion has national, local and personal implications, which require the parents of children with learning difficulties, schools, local education authority and Government to work in unison to include all children as a priority.

On the other hand, Barton (1998, p.84) opined that ensuring the access to mainstream schools is not all but rather it is a process which requires existing school systems to change in terms of physical factors, curriculum aspects, teaching expectations and styles and leadership role. However, Ainscow (2005) termed inclusion as a human rights or social justice principle that embodies values such as equity and fairness. Kozleski et al. (2011) and Loreman et al. (2011) shared the same notion identifying inclusive education as social model of disability and considered it as a multi-dimensional concept of valuing differences and diversity and the consideration of human rights, social justice, and equal opportunities.

To ensure the successful implementation of inclusive education it has implication for both educational institutions and the state as well. Glazzard (2014) identifies inclusion as a proactive stance that challenges the educational setting to make adaptations and adjustment for meeting the need of diverse learners. The purpose of inclusion is to offer the right of equal educational opportunity to all learners and this right need to be guaranteed through equality legislation, which places a statutory duty on schools and educational settings to make reasonable adjustment to break down the barriers to participation and achievement.

The above notions of inclusive education, including the Salamanca Statement to other definitions and state legislations guide us to summarise that inclusive education (IE) is an evolving concept which involves identifying and addressing the sources and consequences of exclusion in education adopting a holistic framework of EFA goals (UNESCO, 2005). Moreover, these notions on inclusive education also lead to a coherent and complementary link with the right based approach to education.

UNICEF (2007) defines the goal of a rights based approach as "to assure every child a quality education that respects and promotes her or his right to dignity and optimum development. Achieving this goal is, however, enormously more complex" (p.1). According to UNICEF (2007) the right to education does not mean only access to education but also an obligation to eliminate all kinds of discrimination at all levels of the education system and to improve the quality of education.

In discussing the quality education component of a rights based education, three elements are emphasized which promote children's optimum development. These are "attention to the content of the curriculum, the nature of the teaching and the quality of the learning environment" (UNICEF, 2007, p. 33).

The three elements, seen as the pre-requisite for quality education, are further described as: (1) A broad, relevant and inclusive curriculum (2) Right-based learning and assessment (3) Child friendly, safe and healthy environment.

It is emphasized that the absence of any of the three components - right to access, right to quality education and respect for human rights in education - will make this approach dysfunctional, as they are interlinked and interdependent.

Being a developing country with a huge population Bangladesh is facing tremendous challenge in bringing equity within its education system. To address this, equity issues are central in the state's initiatives both in policy and in practice. The Constitution of Bangladesh assured the right to education of every citizen in these words in Article 17; "The state shall adopt effective measures for the purpose of establishing a uniform,

mass-oriented and universal system of education and extending free and compulsory education to all children to such stage as may be determined by law" (Article 17(a), GoB, 1998). Subsequently, in 1990, the government introduced the compulsory primary education act making primary education free and compulsory for the 6-10 years old children of Bangladesh (GoB, 1990).

Various steps have been taken to meet those state obligations. These include food for education later turned to stipend for students, distribution of free textbooks and teaching learning materials, establishing schools in remote areas. Country's one of the biggest education development programs naming 'Second Primary Education Development Program (PEDP II) (2004-2011) incorporated several specific component of inclusive education to address the needs of diverse students in mainstream government primary schools.

An 'Access and Inclusive Education Cell' (AIEC) was established in 2005 within the Directorate of Primary Education (DPE) to initiate and monitoring the progress of inclusive education. An 'Inclusive Education Framework' developed for implementing the inclusive education across the country that identified four particular target groups to bring them into regular classroom. These are gender, children with special need, children from ethnic background and children from vulnerable group (e.g. slum children, refugee children, street children, orphans, children from ultra-poor families etc.). A huge training program on inclusive education for teacher, head teacher and local education officials along with some other intervention is worth mentioning.

Importance was given in PEDP-II to improve the quality of primary education for all children by identifying and addressing the needs of children, especially those who are disadvantaged through inequity, whether because of location, poverty, gender, ethnicity or disability, and therefore deprived of quality primary education (GoB, 2003). With these initiatives, access in terms of enrolment and gender parity has improved significantly.

On the other hand, as other researchers have argued, despite the progress so far achieved, it is not equally applicable to all sections of people in the country. There are variations between urban and rural areas and between districts. Research on poverty and education also reports disparities in education services affecting char lands, the tea gardens, ethnic minorities, people living in extreme poverty, street children, the disabled, domestic workers, children working in factories, children in jails and brothels, and those involved in crime (Nath et al, 2005).

As a signatory to the Salamanca Resolution, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Jomtein and Dakar Declarations on EFA, and according to articles 17 and 28 of the constitution it is an obligation of the state to provide quality education to all children. Recognition of this state obligation is reflected in the National Education Policy adopted in 2010. The main objective of the 2010 policy is to create equal opportunities of education for all children regardless of their talents, aptitudes, social, economic and geographical situations and develop a society that is free from all kinds of discrimination (GoB 2010). The more recent Education Policy 2010, also strongly emphasised the necessity for the inclusion of all children including the children with special needs, girls, children from ethnic and tribal communities, and children who are disadvantaged due to socio-economic reasons (GoB 2010).

In line with the commitment to meet the EFA Goals for inclusive education, other ministries of the government initiated a number of policies like the Bangladesh Persons with Disabilities Welfare Act 2001(GoB 2001) and the National Child Policy 2010 (Ministry of Women & Children Affairs 2010) where education has also been recognised as a fundamental right for all children regardless of their ability, gender and ethnicity.

In continuation of PEDP-2, Government initiated Third Primary Education Development Programme (PEDP-3) since 2011 until to date, where the issues of inclusion got further momentum in respect of inclusion of special needs children. Under the component 2 (Participation and disparities) of the programme, the sub-component naming 'Mainstreaming Gender and Inclusive Education' incorporated to address the particular needs of children with learning disabilities and disable children along with tribal and ethnic minorities children in formal school. The aim as it was stated in the document to "create an inclusive culture based on the principle of that all learners have a right to education irrespective of their individual characteristics or difference" (GOB 2015). In PEDP-3, block fund for assisting school mainstreaming inclusive education, integration of inclusion issues into all training activities, screening of children with learning difficulties as well as health problem were planned. However, the idea of inclusion in paper and in practice has a big gap and education leaders are facing challenges to minimising the gap. Forlin (2001) suggested that one of the greatest barriers to the development of inclusion is because most teachers do not have the necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes to carry out this work.

The Head Teacher is the manager of the school academically and is administratively responsible for student's achievement, teacher motivation, curriculum implementation. In a management perspective, they have to manage teaching learning provision within the school start at student enrolment to student achievement. The Head Teacher also has leadership dimension, which implies providing a vision and strategic directions for the

school. In an inclusive school, the Head Teacher plays a crucial role since inclusion requires a Head Teacher to be responsible for creating a school where all children can learn and feel they belong including those who are perceived as having difficulties in learning.

She further identifies, "teacher's responsibility includes creating appropriate learning climate for the children they teach-that is to say, the physical surroundings and emotional climates in which children are disposed to learn as well as the content of that learning" (p.173).

Therefore, ensuring effective learning in school is a critical dimension for the Head Teacher than the physical inclusion of all children.

On the other hand, many researchers identify teacher's attitudes towards inclusion is a central for successful implementation of inclusive practice in a school and head teacher's support is an important variables of attitudes building. Ryan (2009) opined that; "Teachers who personally support inclusive practice and accept the concept of inclusion can more readily adapt the learning environment to the diverse needs of students and use a variety of approaches and teaching strategies".

In this respect, the Head Teacher's role and support as institutional head plays central role in building of attitudes. Morey et al. (2005) and Jerlinder et al. (2010) identified the support from school administration and other colleagues as one of the other factors that influence teacher's attitudes toward inclusion.

Changing the system for inclusive education implies the changing of culture within the classroom, school and the society as a whole. Therefore, it requires the Head Teacher to engage the support from all stakeholders inside and outside of school. In this aspect Head Teacher, need to employ a leadership style that involves all. Ryan (2006) suggests there are three aspects of leadership practice for successful implementation of inclusive education which a) provide a fair option to all members of school to influence the decisions, practice and policies, b) is a cooperative process that ensure many individuals work together in a diverse way to make thing happen and c) aims to achieve inclusion in all areas of school and beyond and the practice a process which is itself inclusive. Pitts and Spillane (2009) further explained that the leadership practice extends to all individuals beyond the school Head and includes class teachers who may or may not have formal leadership designation. This is a clear indication to view leadership as coming from all levels of a school and encourage all stakeholders to practice leadership to ensure school that is inclusive.

Therefore, effective leadership practice recognises the involvement of many leaders and points to the successful interactions between leaders and followers, not to the sole action of individual leader, which of course demands the involvement of all members of the school community. This is very much a clear reflection of distributed perspective of leadership practice.

Proponents of distributed leadership understand that it means distribution of leadership practice among the formal leader to follower and to the organisation as a whole. Spillane (2006, p,12) explains it "practice distributed over leaders, followers and their situation and incorporates the activities of multiple groups of individuals". He also added that "leadership practice is stretched over these leaders rather than simply being a function of their individual actions". Besides that, Goksoy (2015) has the similar view that "distributed leadership approach addresses leadership along with teams, groups and organisational characteristics".

Harris (2014), one of the leading proponents of 'Distributed Leadership', supports Spillane, by saying, "Distributed leadership is primarily concerned with mobilizing leadership expertise at all levels in the organisation to generate more opportunities for change and to generate the capacity for improvement" (p, 40). According to Harris (2014) the main concern of distributed leadership is to build the capacity for innovation and change which is inclusive and implies a broader involvement of all stakeholders in leadership practice. Though it does not necessarily mean that all will lead, it is believed in distributed leadership that everybody has the potential to lead according to their capacity and experience. Again there is no exact outline how this occurs but exists in different forms depending on the situation. Therefore, a high level of trust and mutual learning is required (p.40). She further asserted, the 'process of leadership' and 'leadership activity' are the two main concerns of distributed leadership. 'Process' is defined by her as how the leadership occurs within the organisation while 'leadership activity' is meant for how leadership is developed, enhanced and extended.

However, Harris (2007) also observed that the term "distributed leadership" can lead to some misunderstanding and misinterpretation. Sometimes distributed leadership is simply understood as associated with some kinds of shared and collaborative leadership. People conceptualise it as distribution of leadership practice among the leader and followers. In some cases, people misinterpret distributed leadership as the opposite form of top down leadership.

In other cases, the word 'distributed leadership' often confused with the 'delegation of leadership power' to others. Harris (2014) terms it "slippery" and open to different interpretation" (p.53). This sometimes misleads followers causing confusion. Harris (2014) also states that, "the way people understand the term distributed leadership and relay the concept to others is important" (p.66). It varies in practice depending upon the

interpretation and social construct found within a school. It relies heavily on day-to-day example demonstrated by the school head. Finally, it needs to be acknowledged that it is not a blue print for success.

From the above discussion, a theoretical perspective of distributed leadership is portrayed but practically it does not provide a role model to become an effective leader or to become an effective practitioner. As Harris (2014) states, "as a theory, it offers a way of understanding and interpreting leadership practice. There is no intention or desire to go beyond that to prediction or prescription" (p.15). However, she further emphasised distributed leadership as an important analytical tool. Harris (2010) also termed distributed leadership as model for developing leadership capacity.

Finally, distributed leadership can be summarised as a leadership model which follows a process that involve leaders, followers, greater numbers of people and their contexts in the leadership practice, which is also stretched over the whole organisation.

Distributed leadership is an inclusive process as it includes all stakeholders in an organisation. Therefore, it provides a culture of collaboration and sharing which is a pre-condition for reaching a solution to any issue. This also implies that in distributed leadership practice solution comes from within the team or organisation not from outside. Therefore, it has some inbuilt merits for the organisational change.

Distributed leadership can be a useful tool to bring change in educational settings or institution since it creates an environment of collaboration and sharing and encourage all to participate in decision making. It also encourages more ideas and initiatives and reduces the risk of authoritarian leadership that is one person holds the key information and power. It can promote the ability of "iron out" any kinds of inconsistency within the organisation.

As a collaborative approach distributed leadership can promote interdependent learning and creativity in the organisation. In this approach everybody is dependent on each other, shares their own ideas and eventually produce a creative result for the organisation. Moreover, as all the stake holders take part in decision making, it promotes a sense of ownership that leads the team to take a sustainable decision. Sustainable decision makes the leadership sustainable.

Another very significant merit of distributed leadership is that it creates an environment for **"Social Capital".** Before explaining the issue this **'Social Capital'** needs to be little elaborated. Harris (2014) comments on Social Capital that "Norms and social relationships embedded in structures that enable people to coordinate action to achieve desire goals". On the other hand, she also refers Cohen and Prusak (2001) for the definition of the Social Capital. They term social capital as "Stock of active connections between people, the trust, mutual understanding and shared values and behaviours that bind the human networks and communities together and make cooperative action possible" (p.4). In addition to that, Harris (2014) comes up with a notion that "the essence of social capital therefore is equitable participation in a joint enterprise, implying shared or distributed leadership and interdependent or collaborative working" (p.78).

Therefore, "social capital" can be summarised as a collective power of people to achieve a common goal that is flourished through a culture of active interaction, collaboration, cooperation, mutual understanding and shared values and behaviours. The central theme is a trusted relationship.

Moreover, it is evident that there are strong similarity between the characteristics (how it works) of distributed leadership and the notions of social capital. Both the notions emphasise collaboration, coordination communication, mutual trust, mutual understanding and shared values among the formal leaders and followers in an organisation. Therefore, in distributed leadership there is favourable environment for flourishing social capital.

However, the question is why social capital matter? Social capital is vital for the leadership if their ultimate goal is organisational change and improvements. According to Harris (2014), "social capital is important because it has the potential to make a difference to organisational performance and improvement" (p.78). It is perceived that relationship or connection among people is the key force of social capital resulted in a productive relationship and this can be used for the betterment or improvement of the organisation. West-Burnham & Otero, (2004) cited by Harris (2014) that; "Evidence suggest that by focusing upon and by improving the productive relationships, leaders can alter an entire organisation's capacity to learn for the better" (p.4).

Finally, it can be summarized according to Harris (2014) that distributed leadership is a model for organisational change. She actually argues; "It shows that distributed leadership if properly planned and enacted has the potential to be a positive influence on organisational change and improvements" (p.59).

Moreover, despite some ambiguity distributed leadership is measured as one of the powerful contemporary leadership model for organisational change. Recent studies confirm a positive relationship between distributed leadership and organisational development. The studies of (Hallinger & Heck, 2009; Harris, 2008, 2009; Leith wood & Mascall, 2008) identify the importance of distributed leadership as a potential contributor to positive organisational change and improvement. It has been argued that hierarchical model of leadership should be replaced with a form of leadership where responsibilities are shared (Ainscow and

Miles, 2008). So, in this respect distributed leadership is used as a lens to understand and analyse the role of Head Teacher in implementing inclusion of special needs children in Bangladeshi Government Primary Schools.

In considering the design of data collection tool, in thinking about the analysis of the data, discussing the findings and drawing conclusions, the conceptual framework of SEN, Inclusive Education and Distributed Leadership discussed above guided the researcher's work.

METHODOLOGY

A qualitative approach was used in the study. There is a strong link between the research topic and the research approach selected as the researcher tried to find out the actual situation of the inclusion of special need children in Bangladeshi Government Primary Schools as well as the role of Head Teachers regarding this issue. This study took place in a natural setting of six Government Primary Schools and employed different qualitative data collection tools like Interview, Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and Document Review to obtain the quality data which mostly guided by the researcher's interpretive skills.

Research participants

A mixture of research participants including six Head Teachers, three Assistant Teachers, one Assistant Upazila Education Officer and one Upazila Education Officer were purposefully selected for understanding the issue from different educational dimensions. Six Head Teachers were selected from six Government Primary Schools from two different Upazila who had special need children in their school. Accordingly, three Assistant Teachers were also being selected in random basis from the same schools. Besides that, two education officers from two different Upazila were also be interviewed to understand the role and leadership issues of Head Teachers. Another ten to twelve parents of special needs children were invited to participate in a focus group discussion.

Interview

He further explained that interviewing takes the researcher into the participant's world. In line with this notion six Head Teachers, three Assistant Teachers and two Education Officers were interviewed to better understand their views on the issue of inclusion of special need children and the role of Head Teacher. A semi- structured interview protocol was developed using open-ended questions. It was designed to identify the challenges of inclusion and understanding the Head Teacher's role in this respect. The protocol was finalised through a four step piloting process which includes a) preparing a draft protocol b) seeking expert opinion from the course faculty c) accommodation of necessary alteration d) pilot testing of two different teachers other than the research participants.

The interviews were conducted in person and in Bengali as both the researcher and participant's first language is Bengali. This allowed the participants a greater nuance of language and produced better description of feelings and practice. All the interviews took place in the respected schools in a convenient time for the participants and lasted for approximately thirty minutes to forty-five minutes. Moreover, all the interviews were audio recorded with prior permission from the participants.

Focus Group Discussion (FGD)

Focus group discussion is a data collection method to obtain information on an issue from different perspectives in a short time. A Focus Group Discussion was organised including twelve parents of special need children to understand the issue from parent's perspective and to collect 'shared understanding from several individuals' (Creswell 2012). The FGD took place in a school premises with the help of a Head Teacher and lasted for about an hour where parents were asked and encouraged to interact in an open discussion about their aspiration of the school and of the Head Teacher for their children's education. A semi structured FGD guide was used to steer the discussion within the focused area and ensured that all participants take part in the discussion. The FGD was conducted in the local language and tape-recorded with full permission granted by the participants. The recording was transcribed immediately after the FGD.

Data analysis

Qualitative research data analysis is particularly crucial in teasing out the findings. The data collected from interviews, FGD and document review was transcribed from recordings as soon as possible and translated

into English followed by organising and categorising the content according to the research question. This analysis approach has five steps, which includes a) preparing raw data, b) close reading of text data, c) categorising the data, d) overlapping coding and un-coded text, e) revision and refinement of category system. All data was placed as evidence to reveal commonalities and discrepancies in understanding a theme.

DISCUSSION

The views of Head Teachers clearly indicate that their understanding of special need children is limited to aspects of physical disability. There are many children who do not have any physical challenges may have other learning difficulties. However, these children are not recognised by the Head Teachers as special needs, which differ with the notion of Children and Family Act 2014 (DfE, 2014) where children with greater learning difficulties are identified as special educational needs. Additionally, this limitation of their understanding leads to a minimisation of their role in this regard. Due to their poor understanding, a significant number of special needs children are being excluded from their attention. Moreover, the absence of any systematic approach to identification of special needs children complicates the process, which could run the risk of matching normal children with special needs and vice versa. The absence of a comprehensive diagnosis tool to identify children who have other learning difficulties than the physical disability and ill-conceived perceptions of Head Teacher affects their ability to recognise and support special needs children appropriately. The perception or understanding of what constitutes special needs precludes a significant number of pupils from correct designation.

Almost all key respondents of this study view inclusion as being the enrolment of all children irrespective of their background including the children with special needs. For most of the respondents, inclusive education practice concerned only physically challenged pupils' enrolment. This 'access only' perception of the Head Teachers about inclusive education can be counterproductive in a sense that it might bring curricular and emotional exclusion for these children (Clough, 1998). Contrary to this, only one Head Teacher rightly identified inclusion as process for limiting or removing barriers to learning, which involve a change in curriculum, teaching learning and infrastructure, very similar with the notion of Barton (1998) that existing school systems need to be changed in terms of physical factors, curriculum aspects, teaching expectation and styles and leadership roles. This perception might be derived from the current inclusive education training designed for the Head Teachers by the Directorate of Primary Education. It also indicates that most Head Teachers lack knowledge and understanding of what constitutes inclusion.

There are several possible explanations of the above finding. Educating special needs children in the mainstream school is fairly a new concept in Bangladesh. A significant numbers of Head Teachers have given training on inclusive education within a programme that is been current. It is certain that most of the Head Teachers are motivated by the training that has had some impact on their attitudes and thinking. On the other hand, all the Head Teachers are mostly experienced teachers who have experience of working with special need children and they exhibited a positive attitude towards the agenda. It is found in various studies that teacher with special needs training or who have previous experience with special need children are more ready to implement successful inclusion than their colleagues who do not have this experience (Bhatnagar and Das 2013, Schmidt and Vrhovnik 2015).

Moreover, frustrations arise as a result of a lack of support, resources and capacity. Schools are overcrowded in Bangladesh with high student-teacher ratio. One Head Teacher complained that she has ninety-nine students in grade one and only forty-five minutes are allocated for the class teacher. In this short period, the class teacher is unable to give the required time for two special need children in her class (HT.1). Lack of support from other teachers and colleagues, non-supportive infrastructure, lack of community involvement including the parents of special needs children and lack of resources including teaching learning materials are the stated reasons behind their frustration. Khan (2012) found similar phenomena in Bangladesh that, teacher in general agree with inclusion but have some reservation towards some factors that influence its' course. Teachers are faced with oversized classes with inadequate training and teaching learning materials. They also stress the need for greater support and encouragement for their work. Bhatnagar and Das (2013) and Mukhopadhyay (2014) in a recent study similarly accentuate that insufficient preparation of teacher for the inclusion agenda and this lack of support undermines their self-confidence, while causing stress and preventing successful engagement with the challenges of inclusion.

These findings show that the role of Head Teacher regarding the inclusion of special needs children is limited to access and participation. Little found concern in ensuring learning for these children. All the participants were concerned about their access, participation and safety but less so in ensuring their other learning needs. Training for Head Teacher should ensure that they are able to demonstrate the skill of conducting an inclusive class so that they can provide a role model back in their own school. The Head Teacher should consider training other members of their staff in the special needs agenda so that the issue of special need can be addressed more effectively by a special need team developed within the school. In the aspect of

leadership, Head Teachers follow an instructional approach giving guidance to the other teachers. There are no strategies to involve other members of staff in leadership practice regarding the challenge of inclusion.

The data suggest that there is a very few Head Teachers who involve the parents and community in addressing the inclusion issues of special need children. It is true that Head Teachers are facing various resource challenges and both infrastructural and pedagogy related issues. However, these issues could be minimised by better mobilisation of the community and the potential resources that they could provide. Head Teachers need to come out of the 'gate keeper' like role to open the school for wider community. They need to be confident that community engagement is not a threat but an opportunity to use wider support. It was also noticeable that the greater majority of guardians from group discussion were most willing and prepared to support the special needs children. So, in this regard Head Teachers need to be proactive to mobilising the community as a catalyst of social capital. As Harris (2014) found the essence of social capital in equitable participation in a joint enterprise, implies shared or distributed leadership and collaborative working.

The capability of the school for supporting the special needs children is linked closely to their successful inclusion. The Head Teachers as an institutional head can play a vital role for enhancing the capacity of teachers as well as the institution. It is now imperative for the schools to maintain a database for every individual special needs child with a progression chart. On the other hand, schools should now start developing a resource base for both the teachers and children. In this regard, the Head Teacher needs to allocate and mobilise the resources from the school fund as well as from the wider community. A special need support team could be formulated with delegated power on behalf of Head Teacher and they could provide the leadership required for a productive link between the wider community and the school to enhance and further develop resources.

Inclusion of special need children in the mainstream has a multidimensional challenge, which requires coordination, cooperation and collegiality between parties involved. It also requires all to act in a concerted way meaning involving all in the process. Leaders' primary work is to engage people to create a shared sense of purpose and direction. In this respect the Head Teacher needs to promote cooperation and assist others to work together to achieve the shared vision. Pitts and Spillane (2009) also emphasised 'for inclusion of all' must go beyond the school's head and include every class teacher who may or may not have any leadership designation in the leadership practice. These features of leadership indicate that the Head Teacher needs to employ a style of leadership practice that is distributed among the other teachers, guardians and to the school as whole.

Attitudinal problems both inside and outside of the school are one of the major barriers for effective inclusion. Although, in the recent years some improvements have been made in this regard, there are still some uneducated parents and teachers who do not believe in their learning. In some cases, parent's poverty encourages their negligence. Certainly, a lack of proper training for teachers makes them ill prepared for this issue. Motivational activities along with some other necessary support from the government and proper training for both parents and teacher are critical to improve the situation. Local education authorities need to take the lead to address this issue by arranging training, sensitisation workshop for teachers and parents, subsidising different assistive devices for special need children. Currently there are some provisions available in Upazila Education Office but the budget and scope is very limited considering the number of schools and pupils within their area.

The result of this study shows clearly an urgent need of specialised teacher or at least a trained teacher on the issues of special education to ensure better students' achievement. The lack of proper training undermines the teachers, which can and does result in low performance of teacher and poor student outcomes. Although the Government is arranging inclusive education training for Head Teachers, thousands of Assistant Teachers are left behind who are the key to teaching learning process. It was also noticeable that Head Teachers are less likely to conduct their classes because of their other business. On the other hand, reviewing the manuals of inclusive education training for Head Teachers, it was found that different idea on inclusion given priority rather than the actual pedagogical skill to conduct an inclusive class. So, the impact of the training is rarely reflected in the classroom. Das (2011) also found in his study that most of the training manuals were not effective for preparing teacher to the children with special education needs in the regular classroom. The World Report on Disability (2011) also emphasises the importance of appropriate training for mainstream teachers if they are to be confident and competent in teaching students with diverse educational needs. The report notes that teacher education programs should be about attitudes and values, not just knowledge and skills (WHO 2011).

The result shows that there is a lack of Government support and intervention regarding the special needs issue. Currently Government is allocating fifty thousand takas equivalent to approximately five hundred GBP for purchasing assistive devices for special needs children against every Upazila. However, the amount is too small for meeting the needs of students from schools, which averages bitween100 to 150. Schools are in need of better funding for meeting various inclusion issues like spacious classroom, special child friendly toilets

and furniture adequate teaching learning materials. More equitable investment from the Government would make the school more child friendly, which will result a better inclusion. On the other hand, the Government needs to extend social safety net to include the children who are especially in need by initiating school meal programme and providing direct assistance to their parents. It is also imperative for the Government to invest more money in infrastructural development specially for meeting the needs of disabled children.

The data shows that local education authorities especially the role of AUEOs and UEOs regarding special needs issue are limited. As key academic supervisor of primary schools, AUEOs' input regarding academic aspect of the special needs children is not well reflected in the schools. It is also noticeable that their understanding on inclusion and special needs children does not vary significantly with those of the Head Teachers. It appears that the interjections are restricted to mainly administrative issues rather than learning and teaching strategies. However, the role of AUEOs, UEOs and DPEOs should include both of an academic and of an administrative perspective. AUEOs and UEOs can also play a significant role to support Head Teachers regarding community mobilisation for the better inclusion of special needs children. However, priorities for such engagement vary at local levels. It is not clear if local level authorities like AUEO, UEO and District Primary Education Officers prioritise this issue.

CONCLUSION

The role of Head Teacher is critical in the successful inclusion of special needs children in Bangladeshi Government Primary Schools. This study examined both the role and explored the challenges that Head Teachers are facing as regards this issue. Recommendations for enhancing their role for better inclusion of special need children were also developed. The study was conducted in two Upazilla (sub-district) of Bangladesh involving six Government Primary Schools as research schools and their Head Teachers. Three Assistant Teachers and three education officials were also included as research participants. Along with twelve semi-structured interviews, a focus group discussion with the parents of special needs children was also arranged for collecting the data. The whole study was guided by three research questions for understanding this issue from three different dimensions. It was a small-scale qualitative study to seek the answer of those questions, which are discussed below.

It was an encouraging finding that Head Teachers have a positive mind-set towards the inclusion of special need children but most of the Head Teachers perceive special needs as being solely about physical disability of children. It was also found that most of the Head Teachers lack knowledge and understanding regarding the issue of inclusion. Generally, the concept of inclusion is understood by almost all participants as being concerned with the physical access of physically disabled children to the school. Ensuring their learning and making the schools fit to address their needs is not currently their first priority. Absence of any systematic and comprehensive diagnostic tools and relevant expertise of teachers for distinguishing special needs is further complicating the situation. Their limited understanding of special need children and inclusion is detrimental in both their strategic thinking and hence their consequent practice. Therefore, it can be concluded that the current understanding of Head Teachers concerning the successful inclusion of special needs children is at a rudimentary stage and needs to be developed.

Regarding the above research questions, it was evident that mobilising the wider community, involving other teachers and school managing committee members in the leadership practices and taking responsibility of continuous professional development for teaching staff could enhance the role of head teacher regarding this issue. Head Teachers need to employ a leadership style that includes all teachers and SMC members with delegated authority in regards of special need children and their inclusion. In essence, this means identification of an assistant teacher and member of SMC who have delegated responsibility to lead the special needs issue within the school. Additionally, there is an urgent need for specialised training of class teachers who are directly involved in teaching special needs children. So, head teachers need to take the responsibility of their continuous professional development and providing adequate teaching learning materials. A rich professional resource centre needs to be developed within the school for developing teaching and professional skills of teachers.

Currently the role of Head Teachers and Assistant Teachers' in securing effective inclusion is underdeveloped. Generally, the issue of inclusion is also poorly understood by both parents and the wider community. Lack of directed professional support from the local education authorities is further exacerbating the challenges for Head Teacher. It was found that the understanding of local authorities such as AUEOs and UEOs of inclusion is not generally well understood and has resulted in low prioritisation at local level. Last but not least, Government expenditure for special needs children in Primary Schools is low considering the need and scale of the problem. Finally, it can be concluded that a lack of awareness, lack of trained teachers and lack of support from the wider community including local education authorities in conjunction with inadequate Government funding are challenges that Head Teachers need to manage to ensure successful implementation of including special need children in the mainstream schools.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Yearly action plan for special needs should be produced and monitored by AUEO's. These plans should be collected at district level and then should form the basis of district planning for the development of the inclusion agenda.

2. Head Teaches need to instigate a performance management strategy, which could target the performance of other teachers including special, needs provisions.

3. Delegation of responsibility to a special need support team, which should include members of SMC.

4. Head Teacher should develop strategies to ensure community support for their special needs programs.

5. Clustering of local schools need to be done to share policy and good practice regarding special needs issues. AUEOs should play lead role in identification of schools.

6. AUEOs should develop their roles both in support and challenging individual schools' practice in special needs issue. Further training will be required.

7. Training for Head Teachers in leadership practice that better engages and involves all stakeholders is required. Training programmes on inclusion need to be revised and developed.

8. Government should develop a comprehensive diagnostic tool for all primary schools and to provide training in its use and implementation along with an adequate supply of these tools to every school.

9. A government developed training program for all teacher and in particular for those teachers with delegated special need responsibilities. This should also include identified members of SMC.

10. There should be increased targeted funding on both the provision and access for special needs children.

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