

**EXAMINING PRIMARY TEACHERS' VIEWS ON TEACHER  
EDUCATION FOR TEACHING STUDENTS WITH  
DISABILITIES IN INCLUSIVE CLASSROOMS IN  
BANGLADESH**

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**Abstract**

The purpose of present study was to examine primary school teachers' views on teacher education for teaching students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms in some selected primary schools of southern Bangladesh. This paper reviewed the current situation of education of students with disabilities in mainstream education setting in the country. A number of 142 in-service teachers from 56 mainstream schools in four southern districts participated in this study. Semi-structured interview and focus group discussion were conducted for data collection. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and general inductive analysis to synthesize into some key themes that are associated with present teacher education program. The major findings of the study revealed that inadequate training of teachers, insufficient resource support, shortage of trainers in training institutes, large class size in training hall, lack of trainers' and trainees' motivation are the main impediments to be competent for teaching in inclusive classroom in Bangladesh. This study should be significant for future curriculum development process of primary teacher education for successful inclusive education.

**Keywords :** Teaching, Students with Disabilities, Teacher Education, Inclusive Classrooms, Bangladesh

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One of the challenges facing education system in Bangladesh is provision of education, as a constitutional right, to those learners who have been marginalized and could not be accommodated by the learning institutions because of different disabilities. Even the majority of those who are accommodated cannot fully participate in learning activities meaningfully in their classroom. These are the students whose needs are special that some modifications within the education system as whole are a precondition in order to enable them to fully participate and benefit from the process of teaching and learning. Bangladesh is still a far away from effective inclusion in terms of quality.

Teachers are considered as protagonist in the process of inclusive education. And, obviously, teacher education plays an important role towards this process. Although the Government of Bangladesh has been implementing inclusive education in formal primary education sub-sector since 2003, it is still at a nascent stage of development. Also, the primary level teacher education and training curriculum lack necessary contents related to disabilities and their instructional implications in the classroom (Munir & Islam, 2005). UNESCO (2006) reports that present teacher preparation programs in Bangladesh cannot make skilled teacher for inclusive classrooms. The formal primary education sub-sector in Bangladesh has only an in-service teacher training system that includes initial (C-in-Ed) and in-service (subject-based) training for the primary school teachers. Unlike other countries there is no pre-service teacher education program in the Primary Teachers Training Institute (PTI) in Bangladesh. In fact, all the training teachers receive is after their appointment and placement in school.



### Definition of 'Inclusion' in Education in Bangladesh Context

Inclusion is defined by Schroth, Moorman and Fullwood (1997) as 'the provision of educational services to students with a full range of abilities and disabilities in the general education classroom with appropriate in-class support'. 'Inclusion' refers to all students being valued, accepted and respected regardless of ethnic and cultural backgrounds, abilities, gender, age,

religion, beliefs and behaviours (Forlin, 2004; United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization, 1994). Inclusion is a human rights or social justice principle which embodies values such as equity and fairness (Ainscow, 2005). In an inclusive school, students are not treated equally but are given equitable support to enable every student to be able to participate physically, socially and academically with their peers. This means that the environment, curriculum, teaching methods, assessment and reporting could all need to be adjusted or differentiated. A student in a wheelchair may need ramps to adapt the physical environment. Teaching may need to cater for a student's learning needs in the same way. A student with learning difficulties may need more assistance with reading or to be able to present knowledge verbally rather than in written form. A student who has difficulty concentrating may need the amount of work to be reduced, to have tasks presented one at a time and to be shown how to self-monitor. Teaching students with disabilities is just one aspect of inclusive schools and communities.

Some of the literature on inclusion argues that teachers need training in special education to include students with disabilities (Heward, 2003; Kauffman & Hallahan, 2005; Mock & Kauffman, 2002; Zigmond, 2003). Other researchers and academics propose that inclusion in education is simply a matter of good teaching practice (Ainscow, 1999; Giangreco, 1996; Skrtic, 1995; Thousand, Bishop, & Villa, 1997).

### **Status of Inclusion in Primary Education in Bangladesh**

In the recent years Bangladesh has achieved a remarkable progress in access to basic education. Bangladesh has undertaken various measures with regard to Education for All (EFA). As a result, the net primary enrolment rate has increased from 65% in 1997 to 91% in 2007 (Jahangir 2008). More remarkably, Bangladesh has already achieved one of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) of gender parity in primary and secondary education (Nasreen and Tait, 2007). Also, the enrollment ratio of students with disabilities in mainstream primary education is increasing year by year (Annual Sector Performance Report, Directorate of Primary Education, 2009). But still there are a lot of shortfalls and challenges in implementation mechanism for inclusion of students with disabilities and promotion of quality education in mainstream primary education in contemporary education system in Bangladesh.

Finding the current status of education of students with disabilities in Bangladesh is a difficult job indeed. The existing statistics are 'only an approximation of the configuration of types of disabilities' (Ackerman and Huq, 2005). This is acknowledged in the Second Primary Education Development Program (PEDP-II) Action Plan (2005) where it is noted that 'in Bangladesh, disability is not included in any routine data collection or surveillance system.

It is estimated that 1,735,121 children in Bangladesh, out of a total population of 18 million children in the 6 to 11 age range, have disabilities. This number represents approximately 9.8 percent of the 6 to 10 year olds (grades 1-4) and 9.9 percent of the 10 to 11 year olds (grade 5) have disabilities. In other words, a conservative estimate is that almost 10 percent of all children within those age ranges have a disability.

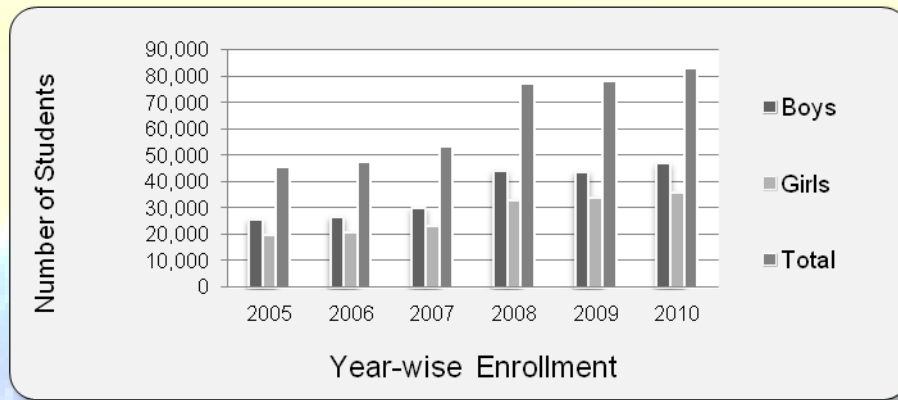
Data on enrollment of students having any of five types of disabilities of mild levels were collected through School Survey 2007 (DPE 2008). The types of disabilities included in the questionnaire were physical disabilities, visual impairment, hearing/speech impairment and mental retardation. However, as per the 2007 School Survey data, there were a total of 53,303 students with disabilities of various types enrolled in Government Primary Schools (GPS) and Registered Non-Government Primary Schools (RNGPS), as of March 2007. Table 1 below provides enrollment of students having any of the above-mentioned disabilities in GPS including Experimental School and RNGPS by gender and by type of disabilities.

**Table 1: Enrollment of students with disabilities in primary schools (%)**

Type of Disabilities	GPS			RNGPS			Total (percent)
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	
Physical Disabilities	5509	4102	9611	2050	1436	3486	13097 (24.57)
Visual Impairment	2983	2284	5267	992	789	1781	7048 (13.22)
Hearing Impairment	1544	1426	2970	727	685	1412	4382 (8.22)
Speech Impairment	5927	3640	9567	2389	1674	4063	13630 (25.57)
Mental Retardation	5753	4995	10748	1917	1831	3748	14496 (27.20)
Others	260	223	483	91	76	167	650 (1.22)
Total	21976	16670	38646	8166	6491	14657	53303 (100)

Source : School Survey Report-2007, Directorate of Primary Education (2008)

Since 2005, the number of enrolled male and female students with disabilities in primary schools is increasing rapidly. As Figure 1 shows, the number of students with disabilities enrolled in GPS and RNGPS increased by 70% between 2005 and 2010. Of the 77,500 students enrolled in 2010, about 25% belong to four sub-categories (physical disabilities, visual impairment, hearing impairment and mental retardation). The results exceeded by far the annual growth rate target of 5% in the enrollment of students with disabilities (Annual Sector Performance Report, Directorate of Primary Education, 2010).



Source : ASPR 2011, Directorate of Primary Education, GoB

**Figure 1: Number of enrolled students with disabilities in primary schools (2005-2010)**

It is very difficult to assess whether this increasing trend reflects the fact that head teachers and other in-service teachers possess positive attitudes in including students with disabilities or whether more students with disabilities have been attracted to school [Annual Sector Performance Report, DPE, 2010].

### Importance of Teacher Education for Inclusive Education: Literature Riview

There is a growing international recognition that the reform of teacher education is necessary to the process of inclusive education (Forlin 2010, UNESCO 2008). Many researchers (Brisk 2002, Gabel 2001, Kornfeld 2007, Swartz 2003) have called for teacher educators not only to examine their students' behaviours towards disabilities but also to engage in self-study and internal evaluation to better understand their capacity to introduce disability issues throughout the curriculum.

It is acknowledged that teacher training plays an important role in fostering teacher efficacy and confidence regarding the implementation of inclusive practices. Teacher training on inclusion issues at initial and in-service level may more adequately prepare new teachers for the challenges of the inclusive classroom environment (Smith, 2005). Teacher training and efficacy are considered as significant variables for acquisition of essential knowledge, skills and strategies of inclusive practices (Brownell, 1999, Jordan, 1993, Soodak, 1998). Thus, teacher training on inclusion may be the most effective platform in shaping teacher attitudes toward inclusion and to enhance teachers' ability to adapt curriculum and instructional strategies to facilitate learning outcomes (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Forlin 1998; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996). The World Report on Disability (2011) 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.

Some educators (Jordan, Schwartz and Richmond, 2009) have shown how teachers' preparedness for teaching students with disabilities is reflected in their practices. Their work indicates that there is a strong relationship between what teachers think about the nature of the ability to learn and the teachers' willingness to accept responsibility for teaching all students.

If educators are well prepared and trained it may allow and encourage practices that will further, to a large extent, successful inclusion of all students (Hobbs & Westling, 1998; Wilczenski, 1992, 1995). Additional training in how to teach students with disabilities leads to improvements in individual attitudes and following on from that, improvements in the school ethos towards educating students with diverse learning needs (Idol, 1997; Loreman, Deppeler, Harvey & Rowley, in press).

Research has shown that positive teacher attitudes toward the inclusion of students with disabilities in the regular education classroom begin during teacher education period (Avramidis, 2000; Campbell, 2003; Martinez, 2003; Shade & Stewart, 2001; Shippen, 2005). The acquisition of essential knowledge and strategies for inclusive practices is quite important during pre-service training, because it can affect teacher efficacy levels and their attitudes toward inclusion.

Research on teacher preparation has been found to be fundamentally flawed due to the lack of specific knowledge surrounding the field (Hamre & Olyer, 2004). Perceived levels of teacher efficacy in coping with the demands of the inclusive classroom are often determined by the 'sufficiency' of training for inclusion. Research comparing the efficacy levels of special and general education teachers has found that general education teachers often find themselves lacking in knowledge and competencies deemed necessary for teaching in an inclusive classroom as compared with their special education counterparts (Buell et al, 1999).

Training for inclusion within general education teacher preparation programs will alert teachers to better understand the goals, objectives, and implementation strategies for the various support services available to better cater for students with disabilities (Nougaret, Scruggs & Mastropieri, 2005; O'Shea et al, 2000). Increased knowledge about inclusion brings about higher levels of confidence, and dissipates the fear and anxiousness often associated with the lack of awareness and exposure to children with disabilities (Avramidis et al, 2000). Thus, the acquisition of knowledge about disabilities builds confidence, and contributes to higher levels of teacher efficacy and more positive attitudes toward the inclusion of students with disabilities. It is thus necessary to address the disparity in efficacy levels reflected by general education teachers through adequate training in order to better cater to the diversity of needs in the regular education classroom, particularly at the initial stage.

### **Objectives of the Study**

This study aimed to achieve three main objectives. Those are as follows:

- To examine the current status of education for students with disabilities in mainstream primary education in Bangladesh
- To identify the challenges of current teacher education programs in the context of inclusive education
- To formulate the possible ways to overcome the barriers in teacher education programs to address the inclusion issues

In addition, this short study has been guided by three major research questions to achieve above mentioned objectives. The research questions are as follows:

- How is the current status of education for students with disabilities in mainstream primary education in Bangladesh?
- What are the challenges of current teacher education programs in the context of inclusive education in Bangladesh?
- What are the possible feedbacks to overcome the barriers in teacher education programs to address the inclusion issues?

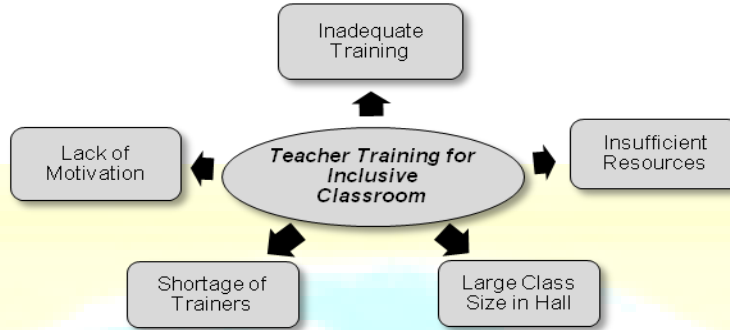
### Methodology

This study is basically a qualitative research and a vital part of first author's doctoral dissertation. A semi-structured interview and Focus Group Discussion (FGD) schedule were prepared with the assistance of academic advisors to interview of purposively selected 142 trained teachers from 56 primary schools located in 4 southern districts (Bagerhat-12 schools, Jessore-15 schools, Khulna-18 schools and Satkhira-11 schools) of Bangladesh who have just completed their foundation course (C-in-Ed) from PTIs. All selected schools are Government Primary Schools (GPS) and a few numbers of students with disabilities are enrolled in those schools. An interview/FGD took about half an hour to accomplish. A group of teachers of the same school were requested to interact with the researcher at a convenient time in the school premise. The whole interview/FGD were tape-recorded and then transcribed. Then General Inductive Analysis approach introduced by David R. Thomas (2003) was employed to analyze the interview data. The purposes for using the inductive approach are to (1) to condense extensive and varied raw data into a summary format; (2) to establish clear links between the research objectives and the summary findings derived from the raw data and (3) to develop of model or theory about the underlying structure of experiences or processes which are evident in the raw data. The inductive approach reflects frequently reported patterns used in qualitative data analysis. Most inductive studies report a model that has between three and eight main categories in the findings. The general inductive approach provides a convenient and efficient way of analyzing qualitative data for many research purposes. In this study the findings were synthesized into five major theme areas. Also, descriptive statistics was utilized to see the percentage of themed opinions of teachers. Moreover, some necessary documents, manuals and reports on primary education and teacher training of Bangladesh were reviewed from the viewpoint of inclusive education.



**Results and Discussion**

Through the interview and discussion five major themes were emerged through interview are as follows: regarding teaching in inclusive classroom in Bangladesh



Key themes extracted from interview	Responses (N=142)	Percentage of responses
1) Inadequate training of teachers	136	95.77%
2) Insufficient resource supports	128	90.14%
3) Shortage of trainers in training institutes	114	80.28%
4) Large class size in training hall	105	73.94%
5) Lack of trainers' and trainees' motivation	97	68.31%

**Theme : 1 : Inadequate training of teachers (Both foundation & In-service)**

Most of trained teachers believed that their foundation training received from PTIs and on-going in-service training are not adequate to be acquainted with students with disabilities and to teach them effectively in classroom situation. Many of the interviewees urged to incorporate some contents related to disabilities in students, their unique and individual needs and some possible teaching strategies into C-in-Ed curriculum and subject-based in-service training course usually held at URC. They also feel that some practice-oriented activities along with theory in those courses can make them confident and good practitioner in teaching in inclusive classroom.

**Theme : 2 : Insufficient resource supports**

According to the interviewees, due to lack of necessary supports from training center or local education authority, it is quite difficult for them to deal with the students with disabilities even if they have positive stance to work in this challenging situation. The resource supports that are

deficient in training centers includes financial support (incentive), special education or inclusion expert as resource persons, physical environment, teaching-learning materials, teaching aids etc. Interviewee teachers also recommended that there should be some collaborative activities between training institutes and local special education schools for a few weeks for practicum.

### **Theme : 3 : Shortage of trainers in training institutes**

A small number of trainers in training institute cannot serve around 400 trainees efficiently. Typically, in primary training institutes there are 10-12 teacher trainers (in Bangladesh it is called Instructor) for training a huge number of trainee teacher in two shifts. That's why, even if the trainee teachers who have experience in dealing students with disabilities in their classroom cannot ask any instructors about the accommodation of this group of learner and adaptation method of teaching strategies for them, because the trainers are to be very busy with their heavy work load. However, most of the teacher trainers do not have sufficient knowledge of inclusive education, students' disability issues and their appropriate remedial arrangement in mainstream classroom.

### **Theme : 4 : Large class size in training hall**

Some teachers felt that big size class during receiving training is a major impediment for trainee teachers to be effectively trained. Typically Bangladeshi primary teachers training hall consist of 60-70 trainee teachers at a time. This definitely hinders to ensure the quality teaching-learning in training room. Interviewees suggested making separation as much as possible so that other educational issues such as inclusive education can be discussed. Teachers realized if some evidence-based teaching strategies like team-teaching, peer-tutoring etc. are practiced in training session, they could be familiar with these methods and later could apply in their classroom.

### **Theme : 5 : Lack of trainers' and trainees' motivation**

Motivation is concerned with the factors that stimulate or inhibit the desire to engage in behavior. They indicated that due to lack of proper knowledge regarding disability and students with disabilities they are not self-motivated. Also, they pointed out that they are not familiar about the existing policy, laws and legislation about education of students with disabilities in ordinary

schools in Bangladesh. It should be noted that most of the interviewee teachers heard about these for the first time during interview session.

### **Conclusion and Implications**

Inclusion involves a large vision and precise competencies for all teachers. Now the teachers are required to know that diversity is present in the classroom, and that they should attend to learners with a range of diverse needs. In this framework, it is very important to prepare teachers for inclusion in all curricular plans for fresh teachers, also for teachers in services.

Some studies (Shade & Stewart, 2001; Shippen et al, 2005) have reported that the inclusion of a single subject on students' disabilities is enough to improve teachers' mind-set. Other research studies (Kamens, Loprete & Slostad, 2000; Martinez, 2003) have proposed that more units to be included in general teacher education curriculum for preparing capable and efficient teachers for inclusive classroom.

There is an obvious need to revisit the teacher education curriculum to ensure that inclusive teaching strategies are incorporated into teacher education curriculum. Trainee teachers need to be equipped with skills such as Sign Language and Braille, so that they can effectively deal with certain students' special education needs. It may also be worthwhile to establish the preparedness of teachers' training centers to train teachers for inclusive teaching. If teacher trainers do not have the requisite skills for inclusive teaching, they will not be able to impart such skills to the trainee teachers. Similarly, if teacher training centers do not have equipment associated with inclusive teaching of certain students, it becomes difficult for trainers to equip teacher trainees with relevant skills. Those teachers who are already in the field should be equipped with inclusive teaching strategies through workshops and in-service training. The Ministry of Primary Education should deploy at least one special education teacher in schools to assist teacher trainees and regular teachers with the preparation of work and teaching in inclusive classes. If the training institutes as well as the trainers are well equipped with inclusive teaching techniques, it will be possible for them to offer appropriate guidance, help and support to both trainee teachers on teaching practice and other qualified teachers under their supervision.

Preparing teachers for inclusive classroom has undergone a major pedagogical shift in recent years. It is apparent that with the gradual inclusion of students with disabilities into the regular classroom, there is a need for special education content to be incorporated into teacher preparation courses, as well as merge of practical experiences to effectively teach all the students regardless of their disabilities. To ensure quality teaching-learning in inclusive primary classrooms there is no way to better reform present primary teacher education and training system in Bangladesh.

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