Attitudes and Concerns of Teacher Educators towards Inclusive Education for Children with Disabilities in Bangladesh

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Abstract

This study examined the attitudes of teacher educators towards inclusive education in Bangladesh secondary schools in order to further understand the challenges faced by countries that are economically marginalised in implementing educational reforms that even developed countries sometimes struggle with. Twenty teacher educators from Bangladesh participated in the qualitative study designed to explore participants’ understanding and perspectives of inclusion. Teacher educators’ attitudes towards inclusive education was generally positive, however participants were unsure how to implement inclusive education. The findings are considered alongside the Bangladesh government’s objective of inclusive education and further research opportunities are identified.

Introduction

This article addresses the complexities of implementing inclusive education in a challenging politico-economic context. Bangladesh is a country with a history that pre-disposes it to social justice, but also makes it hard to achieve. The history of successive colonisations and independence is discussed by other authors in this issue. Here attention is drawn to several significant aspects of that history. The first is the legacy of the language martyrs and of the founding constitution. Throughout Bangladesh, especially in universities and government teachers’ training colleges there are monuments to those who died in the struggle to assert and preserve Bangla, the native language of the people and the land. The monuments and the passionate memories of Bangladeshi people are a constant reminder of how the right of the people to their own language, and by implication to their own values, is important enough to place life itself at risk. The language movement was a significant precursor to the fight for full independence. At independence the new Bangladesh constitution affirmed the importance of nationalism, secularism, socialism, and democracy as foundations of nationhood. This legacy offers a clear ideological foundation on which issues of social justice, such as those involved in inclusive education, can be based. On the other hand, other legacies of history, particularly those of poverty, widespread illiteracy, and economic dependence on other countries, place constant, and sometimes apparently insuperable, difficulties in the path of achieving the goals that many recognise as just and desirable. It is in this context that initiatives take place to develop inclusive education for children with disabilities. Internationally the concept of inclusive education for children with disabilities is an interrogation of normative schooling practices that marginalise to the point of exclusion from the benefits of education those who have some form of physical, sensory or intellectual impairment. There is the dual challenge in Bangladesh to make education universally available and to transform the limitations of earlier practices.

The first author is an active participant in the development of strategies to achieve a successful implementation of inclusive practices, but, like others in the planning of the
national project, he is fully aware that more than idealism is needed. This article therefore identifies and freely discusses obstacles and difficulties. Clearly these should not be seen as deficits within Bangladesh itself; they are products of other nations’ politics as much as they are realities Bangladesh needs to deal with. To deny the difficulties, be they in prevalent attitudes or in economic constraints would constitute a false championship for the needs of those who, in the language of international power relations, might be called the oppressed. What is really needed is the freedom to name problematic issues, as well as to explore their solutions. Readers from Bangladesh and from countries with similar histories should find such discussion particularly pertinent. While Bangladesh strives to meet its constitutional goals of national autonomy, in order to implement its policies of universal access to education, it often has to draw on the resources (through loan and donation) of more economically powerful partnerships. The second author comes from a study programme funded by one such loan. Academic, strategic and financial support is needed at this time to make change possible. Sometimes they carry ideological complexities that need to be critically analysed and carefully navigated. That too is a reality of survival. The collaboration in authorship of this article affirms both authors’ belief that the complexities can be navigated and that the collaboration is useful.

**Education context in Bangladesh**

Ensuring education for all is a stated priority of the Bangladesh education system (Ministry of Law, Justice & Parliamentary Affairs, 2000). This reflects a contemporary philosophical commitment to social justice in the country’s education provision and is in keeping with a number of international declarations and initiatives such as the UNESCO Declaration on Education for All (UNESCO, 1990), the Dakar Framework (UNESCO, 2000) and the Salamanca Declaration on Inclusive Education (UNESCO, 1994). These declarations both advocate for, and impose legal as well as ethical obligations on nations to include all children with disabilities in educational settings. As a result, an inclusive approach to education has featured as the means of achieving education for all children in Bangladesh (Ahsan & Burnip, 2007). To further understand the challenges faced by countries such as Bangladesh in implementing the comparatively new concept of inclusion there is a need to examine factors involved in inclusive education. Specifically, this study examined the attitudes towards inclusion held by those tasked with the responsibility of providing initial teacher education.

Because of a national commitment to make education available to everyone, teacher education is a large sector of the Bangladesh education system. Teachers are trained in more than 188 large, medium and small, public and private institutes, academies, colleges and universities (Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics [BANBEIS] 2006). The challenges in improving teacher education programmes in terms of inclusive education are enormous. In particular, developing an appropriately qualified and knowledgeable teaching workforce is essential to ensuring schools are able to provide for the needs of all students in Bangladesh.

Bangladesh has recently ratified the UN Convention on the rights of people with disabilities (CRPD) of 2006 (United Nations, UN, 2006). This ratification comes from endorsement of the vision, even though the education system is far from achieving inclusion of all students in regular school classes. Article 24 of the convention states a legal obligation - to ensure the educational rights of all people with disabilities without discrimination and on the basis of equal opportunity. Thus education will be inclusive and students should not be excluded from the general education system including free and compulsory primary education and secondary education. Examples of the obligations under the declaration include the following from Article 24: “Persons with disabilities can access an inclusive, quality and free primary education and secondary education on an equal basis with others in the communities in which they live...(a) Facilitating the learning of Braille, alternative script, augmentative and alternative modes, means and formats of communication and orientation and mobility skills,
and facilitating peer support and mentoring; (b) Facilitating the learning of sign language and the promotion of the linguistic identity of the deaf community” (UN 2006, p.16-17). If the Bangladesh education system is to meet the commitments under the declaration, there is an urgent need for reform of the existing teacher training system. For example, current teacher training programmes provide no sign language, Braille or other forms of communication that may be appropriate for effective inclusion of all students.

A key role of teacher educators is to prepare pre-service teachers for the changing classroom environments of the future (Clement, 2010). As teacher attitudes are highly influential on the support and inclusion of students with special needs in regular classrooms (Macfarlane, 2007; Sze, 2009), teacher educators must play active roles in developing inclusive attitudes among pre-service classroom teachers. The values instilled in classroom teachers during their pre-service education are critical to their development of classroom practices that support the inclusion of children with diverse learning needs (Mortier, Hunt, Leroy, van de Putte, & van Hove, 2010). Mortier et al.’s (2010) research implies the need for teacher educators to support pre-service teachers’ development of inclusive attitudes by emphasizing the need for partnership between teachers and parents within local contexts. In the field of pre-service teacher education, there is no published research on inclusive education in Bangladesh. There is an urgent need to conduct research in this area to ensure that policies and practices are informed by research.

Though the terms ‘inclusion’ and ‘inclusive education’ are often used, the concept of inclusion remains difficult to define. Research suggests there is no commonly understood meaning of inclusion (Epstein & Elias, 1996). Inclusive education is a strategy to ensure education for all students in the same classroom. A comprehensive definition of inclusive education could be achieved by considering Mitchell’s (2010) ‘Magic Formula’ of inclusive education. The formula is:

Inclusive education = Vision + Placement + Support + Resources + Leadership + 5As
(Acceptance, Access, Adapted Curriculum, Adapted Assessment, Adapted Teaching)

According to the formula, for achievement of an inclusive education system there should be a vision at all levels of education in a country; Placement that should be age appropriate and in community/neighbourhood schools; Support which must be available for students, families and professionals; Resources (e.g., trained teachers, assistive technologies, infrastructure); appropriate educational leadership that facilitates inclusion; and, the “5As” (Mitchell, 2010). Thus, inclusive education is a strategy to address educational needs of all children in a systematic way in a regular school classroom.

Inclusive education therefore demands a need for teacher educators to support pre-service teachers to develop knowledge and skills in developing classroom environments that support learning for all children. For example, the consideration of seven best practices identified by De Jong (2005) in pre-service teacher education programmes could support the development inclusive learning environments. These practices include:

• a culture that promotes health and well-being;
• a relevant, engaging and stimulating curriculum;
• effective pedagogy;
• a clearly articulated and comprehensive behaviour management policy;
• a democratic, empowering and positive classroom management approach;
• well established internal and external support structures and partnerships; and
• an alternative flexible learning environment, (De Jong, 2005, pp-359-363).

Ideally, teacher educators should have a clear understanding of these and other practices and well developed skills in supporting pre-service teachers to develop knowledge and abilities in these practices. Because, teacher actions have a direct link with students’
learning in schools, and Teacher-educators’ actions have great influences on the effective practices of student-teachers (Paris, Polson-Genge & Shanks, 2010).

Research has indicated that teachers’ positive attitudes have a direct link with the success of inclusion (Kuyini & Desai, 2007; Sze, 2009). Several researchers have focussed on teachers’ attitudes related to inclusion (Chhabra, Srivastava, & Srivastava, 2010; Cook, 2004; Cook & Cameron, 2010; Cook, Cameron, & Tankersley, 2007; Grace, 2006; Heiman, 2001; Ross-Hill, 2009; Ryan, 2009). In an Indian study, Sharma, Moore and Sonawane (2009) investigated attitudes and concerns of 480 pre-service teachers enrolled in a Bachelor of Education programme. The findings suggested that students’ attitudes towards inclusion are somewhat negative and that this negative tendency was related to the attitudes and beliefs of the teacher educators within the programme. The study of Kuyini and Desai (2007) in Ghana showed that attitudes towards inclusion and knowledge of inclusion are directly linked with effective teaching practices in an inclusive setting. Mortier et al. (2010) identified five teachers’ perspectives that appeared to support the development of educational opportunities for children with disabilities and promote effective inclusion practice in regular classrooms. These included; (a) an open attitude, (b) a safe group environment, (c) equal input into the construction of ideas, (d) committed to success, and (e) a positive atmosphere. To ensure classroom teachers have positive and supportive attitudes towards children with disabilities, there is a need to understand the attitudes of teacher educators who are responsible for the provision of pre-service training for classroom teachers.

The current study is underpinned by the ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1992). This model provides a commonly accepted theoretical framework for considering the inclusion of students in educational settings. The ecological model emphasizes the links between contextual factors and human development (Macfarlane, 2007). For example, the model suggests that children’s learning is influenced by factors such as the provision of classroom support, teachers’ skills, and the influences of family and community values (Bronfenbrenner, 1992). Within this model, teacher educators have a vital role in helping teachers to expand their skills. Therefore, teacher educators are likely to influence the scope and nature of inclusion at all levels of schooling. They can motivate teachers and teach how to create appropriate inclusive environments in classrooms. Along with the ecological model, the current study is also linked to the socio-cultural theory of teaching. This includes the Vygotskian and Deweyan principles as outlined by Beck and Kosnick (2006): “knowledge is constructed by learners; knowledge is experience based; learning is social; all aspects of a person are connected; learning communities should be inclusive and equitable” (pp. 9–14).

An understanding of the mission and mandate of teacher training colleges (TTC) or teacher education institutes is critical to understand the roles and responsibilities of teacher educators. The mission of TTCs is to support the achievement of the national goal of providing quality education to all the citizens of Bangladesh (Ministry of Education [MoE], 2010). This mission is achieved through the provision of high quality training and support services in order to ensure that all students of secondary schools receive the best standard of education available. The overall mandate of a TTC is to improve the quality of secondary education. Thus, teacher educators’ have a responsibility to provide both pre-service and in-service training for secondary schools teacher, with an overall aim of increasing the quality of education available to students. The overall education policy is directed towards the philosophy of inclusion (MoE, 2010). As a result, to ensure quality training, a positive attitude towards inclusive education by teacher educators is essential. But existing teacher education practices are not yet comprehensive enough to meet the learning needs of all learners into the classroom. Therefore, a significant study, suggested the need for re-examining the effectiveness of teacher training (JBIC, 2002). In this regard, this study will provide insight and stimulate thinking for teacher education in Bangladesh.
Teacher educators conduct both in-service and pre-service training courses for secondary level teachers at teachers’ training/education institutes. There are currently 249 teacher educators working within 14 government teacher training colleges (BANBEIS, 2008). Public Service Commission undertakes a competitive examination to recruit teacher educators to work within the Bangladesh Civil Service. Applicants must have a bachelor’s degree in education along with a postgraduate or masters’ degree in an appropriate discipline. Interestingly, classroom teaching experience is not a prerequisite. As one of the study reports on the Bangladesh education sector, states: “As for specialized professional tasks, the present recruitment, placement and deployment rules and practices do not allow for anyone to acquire professional skills, stay on the job in the same field and be promoted and rewarded for working in one’s specialty” (Ahmed, Ali & Khan, 2005, p.24).

As a result of the need for multifaceted and immediate implementation of a project for universal education, the process of becoming a teacher educator is not as specialized as in western countries. For example, in New Zealand a person working at a University providing pre-service teacher education often has a Masters or PhD degree and usually has some practical experience. This practical experience involves registration with the Teachers’ Council. A prerequisite for membership of the Teachers’ council is an understanding of the critical role of teachers in enabling the educational achievement of all learners (Ministry of Education of New Zealand, 2009).

At present, secondary teacher education in Bangladesh is mainly delivered at TTCs. These TTCs offer Bachelor of Education (BEd) and Master of Education as pre-service courses. The one-year long BEd qualification is the main pre-service teacher training program for secondary level teachers. This is a professional course overseen by the national university according to article number 47 of the National University Act 1992 (Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs, 1992). In order to make a difference in students’ learning outcomes, teacher training (both in- and pre-service) at all levels, is struggling from a lack of resources to meet both the quantitative and qualitative requirements of improving the training programmes (Ahmed, Ali & Khan, 2005).

The new Bangladesh education policy sets 14 objectives for teacher-education (MoE, 2010). These objectives include the establishment of an inclusive education system. According to the education commission, objectives of teacher education also include:

- assisting teachers to acquire necessary skills and knowledge regarding teaching-learning strategies;
- enhancing professional competence of teachers;
- introduction of evidence-based teaching strategies;
- motivation of teachers to conduct research and preparing report;
- ensuring equity in education in terms of sex, race, religion, disability and ethnicity (MoE, 2010).

In order to ensure quality education is achieved by meeting these objectives, research is needed into the various aspects of teacher education and outcomes for students with diverse learning needs. Therefore, it is important to conduct research on teacher education in Bangladesh to find out teacher educators’ attitudes towards inclusive education for pupils with disabilities to ensure quality education for all. The study investigated the following research question: What are teacher educators’ attitudes, knowledge, and beliefs towards inclusive education practices for children with disabilities in Bangladesh?

**Methodology**

The study employed a qualitative design in order to answer the research question in a pragmatic way by using ‘what works’ (Rocco et al., 2003). Three open-ended questions and 11 closed questions focusing on participants’ background information were included to provide an in-depth understanding of the participants’ perspectives on inclusion.
Participants
Ten participants were Bangaldeshis studying towards a Masters of Education and based in Christchurch, New Zealand along with the first author, and another ten participants were working at different teacher training colleges in Bangladesh. The participants were invited to participate in the study and provided with information sheets and consent forms. The respondents included eight females and twelve males aged 30 to 50. The participants were lecturers and assistant professors working in 14 different government teachers’ training college. Ninety percent of the participants had a previous postgraduate degree, and 10% had a Masters of Philosophy. Most participants were serving in the field of teacher education for an average of 6 years, but only 30% had experienced teaching a student with a disability.

Interviews
The questions attempted to determine the attitudes of teacher educators towards inclusive education. Qualitative in-depth interviews (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007) were undertaken to examine this issue. The open questions used in the interviews were:
A. What do you think that are the main barriers in education for a student with a disability?
B. How would you like to see inclusive education in Bangladesh?
C. Do you have any other comments or thoughts about inclusive education?
Interviews were recorded and then transcribed for analysis. Interviews were conducted in Bangladeshi and then translated by the first author who also speaks English. For full details of the interview questions and methods used please see Rahaman (2011).

Findings
A variety of barriers to inclusion were reported at different levels, including society, family, school and individuals. For example one teacher portrayed a societal barrier to inclusion as:
Inclusion is a good concept, but you need to remember child labour is prevalent. Many children need to work and earn to supplement a meagre family income and therefore do not attend school. Schools often lack facilities and teaching aids including classroom space, toilets, drinking water, blackboards, and chalk.

Such a negative scenario is likely to challenge the inclusive education initiatives of the Bangladesh government. Further barriers to inclusion were reported by participants. The following example focussed on teacher training:
We have every wish to include children with disabilities into our regular classroom, even though it may increase our workload, but we are not sure how to handle those children, I had no training on disability [inclusive education] during my pre-service B.Ed. Under the Continuous Professional Development Training under TQI-SEP [MoE], I received inadequate knowledge on disabilities.

This is also supported by Ahsan and Burnip (2007) who identified lack of training as one of the barriers of inclusion in Bangladesh.

Beyond the negative circumstances identified, a consistently positive finding from the survey was the positive potential of inclusive education. When discussing the best educational options for children with disabilities, 90% of the teacher educators interviewed were in favour of inclusive education, while only 10% believed that separate special education was still the best option for students with disabilities. The teachers who expressed favour for special education indicated that most of the regular schools were not ready to include students with moderate disabilities, and no meaningful support system has yet been developed or introduced. One teacher identified class sizes in general were too large to manage the inclusion of students with disabilities. Another teacher educator also pointed out:
The student with disabilities would get better service from special schools and there might have a better chance to acquire some vocational skills along with academic
skills. We do not yet have any therapy services (e.g., for students with physical and/or speech and language disabilities) at school level.

Responding to this open-ended question “What do you think that are the main barriers in education for a student with a disability?” the respondents identified five barriers:

- lack of access to mainstream education;
- low [or lack of] expectation of teachers and peers;
- negative attitude of family and non-disabled peer;
- lack of friendly atmosphere in the classroom;
- demanding special attention.

One teacher educator stated:
To be honest, I’ve never dealt with a disabled student. I don’t even have a little knowledge about the nature of education of such students.

Conversely a teacher with an understanding and desire for inclusion expressed:
Inclusive education is the only way for students with disabilities to enter into the mainstream. So this chance should not be hindered with lame excuses.

However, the debate on education for students with disabilities continues in the country. Many of the teacher educators suggested:
If resources are available to support inclusion, and if there is adequate administrative support and appropriate infrastructure, teaching material and technological devices, then the aim of inclusive education will be successful.

One teacher educator expressed a mixed position regarding inclusion:
All student/children regardless of disabilities or abilities should have equal privilege by being inclusive – specific needs must be catered for individually through a specialised system.

Teacher educators also made suggestions regarding the steps to eliminate those barriers. The steps identified included: ensuring effective identification, diagnosis and appropriate early intervention; developing a positive attitude at all levels (from family to society); creating barrier free learning environments; ensuring parental involvement in educational decision making; curriculum modification and simplification; and develop school based support services, serve necessary aids and appliances for the special child.

Regarding the existing teacher training curriculum, the teacher educators expressed their frustration that the curriculum is not developed enough to support the transformation of school teachers into effective inclusive educators. The highest number (70%) of teacher educators said that the existing curriculum did not address the needs of different types of learners. They also expressed their concern regarding the evaluation system. One teacher educator said:
There should be a scope for rethinking the appropriate academic evaluation system for different types of learners in the same class, especially in high schools. It is not fair to expect the same result from a student with and/or without disabilities. The aim of education is different for them. So, the evaluation system needs to be changed.

Another teacher educator suggested:
Teachers’ training curriculum should cover the diverse needs of different types of learners. The content should be designed to sensitize the disability issue in education.
Beside this, 100% of the teacher educators opined that there should be a compulsory core paper, could be called 'Inclusive and Disabilities Studies' in the B.Ed Program.

For initial teacher education, Clement (2010) suggests, “If you write a good enough lesson plan, you won't have discipline problems” (p.41). For this reason, lesson planning is very important for teaching. In the teacher education programme, the teacher educators teach how to prepare a good lesson plan to both teacher trainees of pre-service and in-service teachers. In the existing B.Ed Programme, the B.Ed trainees attend teaching practice twice (six weeks each) in secondary schools under the supervision of a teacher educator. The student teachers must prepare lesson plans to conduct sessions with the school students. To build inclusive attitudes, the issues of inclusion should be integrated into the lesson plan. Surprisingly, no lesson plans addressed such issues. The interview results affirmed that no teacher educators instructed B.Ed trainees to prepare lesson plans from an inclusive perspective. One teacher educator said:

It would be better if the lesson plans of the trainees focused on inclusive education, but the existing formats of lesson plans that we are instructed to follow did not address inclusive issues of the classroom. Sometimes, our students meet one or two children with disabilities in their practice classes. But they always prepare lesson plans for the majority students.

In fact, without having a comprehensive classroom management plan in place (Clement, 2010), the chances of a successful lesson are decreased. Thus, it is the duty of teacher educators to encourage teacher trainees to shift their attitude to address inclusive education in preparing lesson plans.

A lack of knowledge regarding inclusiveness and disability of teacher educators is another barrier. Pressure to urgently staff a large number of training colleges, means that at times college teachers become teacher educators without a qualification in education. One respondent raised the question, “how can an unqualified teacher be a teacher educator? It makes the training initiatives to increase the focus on inclusive education questionable”. As Clement states, “Without sufficient knowledge of classroom management strategies, new teachers may begin their careers striving to manage as they were managed” (2010, p.42). In fact, one respondent stated:

I have no knowledge regarding inclusive education. I completed a degree with honours and masters in Geography. I have no degree on education. But after qualifying through BCS exam, the Government posted me to teachers training college as a teacher educator. How can I teach the teachers about inclusive education?

Based on Clement’s, (2010) observation that if a teacher educator does not have wisdom regarding education and pedagogy, student teachers may be misled during their education. That could be harmful for the overall education system of a country. When the knowledge base of inclusive education is shared in a training college classroom, the student teacher is better equipped with inclusive strategies and is better positioned to support students with a variety of learning needs.

Discussion

Based on the findings of this pilot study, the overall attitudes of the teacher educators towards inclusive education are positive. Teacher educators are still looking for what strategies might work to support full inclusion in regular classrooms. Having a complex and diversified system of education comprising various streams like general education, Madrasah education (a separate stream of education based on Islamic religion that is parallel to the general education system), vocational and technical education, and English-medium, a systematic inclusion movement is required to influence the general education
stream. An all out education reform agenda is the most likely initiative to fulfil the demand of inclusive education. However it remains to be seen if this is possible.

Bangladesh has relied heavily on external borrowing and on the sponsorship of external donor-nations for its various development projects (Japan Bank for International Cooperation [JBIC], 2002). Education for the disabled is no exception. In this regard, there has been a great deal of money injected into restructuring teacher education programmes. The state has acknowledged the responsibility to establish a uniform and universal system of education (MoE, 2010) to ensure that education fulfils the needs of society and promotes values such as patriotism and humanism (Ministry of Education [MoE], 1974). Education seeks to provide the means for its citizens to compete in a global world without losing sight of the virtues of compassion and caring (MoE, 2010).

An increasing dependence on loan and donor contributions for up to one-third of the Bangladesh education “development” budget (in contrast to the annual budget) has provided external development partners with considerable leverage over the focus of contemporary education policies and strategies (JBIC, 2002). For example, the dialogue and technical input from the donor consortium supporting the Primary Education Development Program (PEDP-II) has led to the adoption of a coordinated sub-sector programme approach, as opposed to the continuation of multiple, yet independent, projects. Although donor support for inclusive education practices is occurring at the school level, there is no support being provided at the level of pre-service teacher education.

Providing opportunities for teacher educators to gain experience and knowledge of disability issues are an essential component to support the development of inclusion. The current teacher education system however is not currently inclusive-focussed. Most of the teacher educators had no significant interaction with people with disabilities. Further opportunities such as examination of case studies could help overcome barriers to inclusion. However, there has not yet been systematic provision for the professional development of teachers and teacher educators in terms of inclusion, and so they appear to lack understanding of existing legislation of disability and inclusive education in the country.

Knowledge of the appropriate legal framework for educating children with disabilities is needed. Without a clear and well known framework, teacher educators are unlikely to become fully aware of the rights of educating students with disabilities. This has far reaching implications as The Disability Welfare Act of 2001 (Ministry of Social Welfare, 2001) created provisions for children with disabilities to receive education in the same classroom as their peers who do not have disabilities. This Act provides legislative support for the education of children with disabilities. Part D of this Act discusses the educational rights of people with disabilities and proposes to:

- create opportunities for free education for all children below 18 years of age with disabilities;
- provide them with educational materials free of cost or at a low cost;
- create opportunities for the integration of students with disabilities in regular schools; (Ministry of Social Welfare, 2001).

Therefore, it is imperative for teacher educators to be made aware of this and other legislation relevant to disability and inclusive education.

Supporting teachers’ development of confidence when working with students with disabilities is another area of importance for teacher education. Without this confidence, teachers may struggle to meet the needs of children and therefore prevent the development of inclusion. For example, Maddern (2009) identified the lack of understanding of the needs of students with visual impairment as one reason for the barriers to including a student with visual impairment in a regular classroom.
The role of schools in the inclusion of students with disabilities into regular classrooms remains unclear. Policymakers are still in favour of creating awareness for social inclusion. Their stance comprises only enrolling children with disabilities into mainstream schools, and does not emphasize the quality of the process. The remarks of one teacher educator during informal discussions asserted, “Inclusion is not only concerned about children with disabilities as well as concerned to provide education for all.”

Several teacher educators constructed an argument against inclusion. According to these teachers, special education is still the best option for students with disabilities. These respondents expressed that most of the regular schools are not ready to include students with moderate disabilities due to inappropriate infrastructure, teaching-learning strategies, and an inaccessible curriculum.

Paris, Polson-Genge, and Shanks (2010) demonstrated that teacher educators’ practices have a strong influence on student teachers’ practice and philosophy. Thus they urged that teacher educators need to teach student teachers in ways that demonstrate effective practices in initial teacher education (ITE). This creates a need for review and changes to the existing B.Ed curriculum to ensure a philosophy of-inclusive education is presented.

The new Bangladesh B.Ed curriculum has emphasized and advocated for effective pedagogy. In order to be taught the new curriculum successfully, teacher educators need to have a deep understanding of cultural responsive (Mactarlane, 2004) or inclusive pedagogy, so that student teachers can develop values that are then portrayed in their actions (Paris, et al., 2010). For this, teacher educators must have a foundation of professional experience that is appropriate to secondary education levels. So, to recruit any teacher educators, the Ministry of Education should assess his/her experience. Teacher educators should possess knowledge and complete a degree with an education focus that provides appropriate structure or content and pedagogy at the secondary level. Otherwise, “If there is incongruence between the pedagogy that student teachers experience and that which they are expected to implement as teachers in the classroom, teacher educators are doing them a disservice” (Paris, et al., 2010, p.153). If this disparity between training material and expected practice exists, the state will not receive the desired service from teacher educators.

Teacher educators can continue effective social/education dialogue to foster inclusive education and ensure the rights to education of students with disabilities as educational dialogue can provide a clear, accessible and well-illustrated cases for the development of learning and teaching, and social dialogue helps to improve any conditions and pedagogic contexts (Littleton & Howe, 2010). From such dialogue, student teachers may be encouraged and supported. In addition, teacher educators could be role models for their school as well as for wider society.

On the basis of the discussion above, it could be said that teacher educators have a great influence on school teachers. In a study of race-conscious teacher education by Ullucci (2010), a teacher training college (schools of education) impacted their students’ (trainee teachers) ability to be successful in (urban) schools. So, for ensuring inclusive education, at first we need to appropriately support the development of teacher educators. The attitudes of teacher educators appeared to be important in the process of preparing student teachers for inclusive education. This conclusion can be drawn from the data on teaching and learning methods, as well as from the data concerning the behaviour of the teacher educators.

The New Bangladesh Education Policy of 2010 identified that the inadequacies of the existing system of teacher education are themselves a challenge. According to the commission’s report: “Existing teacher education is very traditional, in-complete, certificate
based, more focused on theoretical knowledge rather practical, [has a] huge gap between theory and practice, encouraging rote learning and old paper-pencil test based system.” (MoE, 2010, p.56). It is true for inclusive education and teacher educators. To ensure effective education system, fulfilling the constitutional commitment of EFA, policy makers need to emphasize teacher education.

Macfarlane (2007), writing in the western world, reminds us that there may be a high degree of resistance from educators towards inclusion. This is also true in Bangladesh. This may be due to perceptions and myths surrounding disabilities and also observed behaviour difficulties. It is the duty of teacher educators to manage and support teachers to develop an understanding and positive attitudes towards inclusion. With academic learning, inclusion provides a unique opportunity for our children to learn about humanity (Epstein & Elias, 1996). Systematic inclusion needs reform in the overall teacher education system so that initiatives can emerge from the entire system. For the reason that “public education is like a Web: each strand touches many others, depending upon as well as providing support for the entire structure” (Ferguson, 1995, p.286). Currently it seems that existing policies related to education and disabilities were found to be somewhat contradictory. Preparing the schools as well as teachers for inclusive education is a serious challenge. Appropriate policy formulation and adaptation are required to overcome such challenges. Changing the attitudes of teacher educators in terms of cognition, skills and understanding of inclusion should be a national priority.

Issues for future exploration
Inclusive education is a great challenge for Bangladesh’s education system, especially for the teacher training system. Building positive attitudes along with equipping teacher educators with appropriate knowledge on inclusion is an issue for education reform. Educators need to tackle the issues of: ‘how to include the excluded’ and ‘how to improve the quality and relevance of education in increasingly diverse settings’ (Acedo, Ferrer, & P’amies, 2009, p.228). Kibria (2005) identified seven general barriers towards inclusive education. These are: negative attitudes of people; invisibility in the community; cost; physical access; class sizes; lack of trained teachers; gender discrimination; and identification problems. Teacher educators must work in ways that work to overcome these barriers in order for change to take place.

Conceptual barriers in teacher education endanger the success of plans for inclusive education initiatives. Contradictions remain regarding education for people with disabilities. The Ministry of Education favours inclusive education. However, the Ministry of Social Welfare [MoSW] controls the education initiatives for children with disabilities and is still advocating for a mixed (specialised or separate education) approach. The Directorate of Social Services [DSS] under MoSW control education programmes for children with disabilities, with the view of welfare. There is a little support for the student in terms of the ‘Disability Education Allowances’ (DSS, 2008). Funding available compares unfavourably with that in more economically advantaged countries like New Zealand, where such schemes as Ongoing Resourcing Scheme (ORS) and special education grants operate. Alongside the inter-ministerial tensions, there is no school-based support programmes involving specialists such as learning and behaviour specialists, counsellors or speech-language therapists. Article no 8.1.6 of the National Social Welfare Policy of 2006 of Bangladesh recommends mixed approaches for special education, including establishing new institutions for the education of children with disabilities (MoSW, 2005). In this initiative, teacher educators are not equipped to work with children with disabilities in regular classrooms. This is another example of the many factors that will influence the success of inclusive education in Bangladesh.

According to Gomes (2009) there are a number of chronic factors affecting the Bangladesh education sector. These include:
While it needs to be acknowledged that each of these factors can be attributed to the effects of past colonisations and present poverty, it also needs to be noted that they are likely to negatively influence the success of inclusive education initiatives. Many schools are not open to the idea of supporting children with disabilities; even if a few are normally included they encounter negative treatment where peers are not sensitive to disability issues, and teachers have no training (CSID, 2002a). In contrast, special schooling deprives children by keeping them away from their peers and siblings because of their disabilities. However, the role of schools in the inclusion of students with disabilities into regular classrooms remains unclear. Policymakers are still in favour of creating awareness of social inclusion rather than strengthening the capacity of teacher training institutions. Their stance only focuses on enrolling children with disabilities into mainstream schools, and does not emphasize the resources needed to ensure the quality of the process.

It could be said that inclusion (but not full inclusion) with the options of special education considering the degrees of disabilities is the best option for education of persons with disabilities in this 21st century. A blended system is ideal where mainstream education will open the doorway to education for a number of children with disabilities; at the same time that the special education system will ensure the learning needs of children with disabilities are addressed. However, inclusion could be treated as social/affective education for all learners. Inclusion provides a unique opportunity for our children to learn about humanity (Epstein & Elias, 1996). Systematic inclusion needs reform at many levels in the education system and wider society – including efforts from a small group of teachers. This is because “public education is like a Web: each strand touches many others, depending upon as well as providing support for the entire structure” (Ferguson, 1995, p.286). Bangladesh’s existing policies related to education and disabilities are contradictory. Preparing the schools as well as teachers towards providing an inclusive education is a serious challenge. Appropriate policy formulation and adaptation are required to meet this challenge.

Implementing inclusive education practices in Bangladesh will not be easy. However Bangladesh’s historical predisposition to social justice, including its long struggle to preserve its cultural identity and language, creates a positive context for recognising the need to provide inclusive education services at the same time as acknowledging barriers. An initial local step in this provision may be found in supporting the development of teacher educators. To become a teacher educator requires reflection to examine the identity and practices of oneself as educators. Williams and Power (2010) define this reflective process as “a process by which teachers reflect on their practice, incorporating an examination of personal beliefs, mission and identity” (p. 115). This reflective process must also include input and support to help teacher educators understand how their beliefs and identities are influenced by broader issues. These include examination of issues such as unequal relations of power and complexities and contradictions within local, global and inter-related social hierarchies that generate and preserve conditions of exclusion. There remains a continuing need to question if the barriers that are related to historical and existing social hierarchies
require more complex analyses and ideological engagements with ideas of modernity and schooling rather than just the development of personal knowledge, skills and reflection. In Bangladesh both processes are needed. Through consideration of and reflection on both macro- and micro-level issues, policymakers, teacher educators and teachers may well move closer towards providing classrooms where all children are welcomed and provided with effective educational experiences.

References


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