

Social Inclusion in the Secondary School Classrooms in Bangladesh

Md. Tariqul Islam^{*}
Farhana Rashid^{**}

Abstract

There are not many instruments found to measure social inclusion in an educational setting. This study employed Social Inclusion Assessment Instrument (SIAI) to measure students' perception about practices of social inclusion in Bangladesh. Data were collected from secondary level students in four districts. Statistical analyses were carried out to assess the reliability and validity of the Bangla version of SIAI. Results indicate that the instrument is acceptable for use in the Bangladeshi context. Students of secondary schools covered by the study felt socially included to a certain extent but significant variation was found among the students of each classroom.

Key words: Social Inclusion, Assessment Instrument, Classroom Practices

I. Introduction

The term inclusion is very broad (and it is not only a special education issue (Refice, 2006; Dixon & Verenikina, 2007). Inclusive education is based on the premise that all children can learn and that all also need various kinds of support in learning. It is “ a dynamic process which is constantly evolving according to local cultures and contexts and is part of the wider strategy to promote an inclusive society” (UNESCO 2001, p.32).

Ainscow, Booth and Dyson (2006) developed a typology of six ways of thinking about inclusion. According to them, inclusion concerns students having special educational needs. It is also a response to disciplinary exclusion, relates to all groups seen as being vulnerable to exclusion, a matter of developing school for all as in ‘Education for All’, and a principled approach to education and society. ‘Social Inclusion’ is the way of thinking that can ensure inclusive education covering all of these typologies.

As Luxton put it, “Social inclusion reflects a proactive, human development approach to social wellbeing that calls for more than the removal of barriers or risks” (Luxton, 2002, p.viii). It “invokes us to cultivate in all children an appetite for involvement, self-expression and self-discovery, along with a well-founded expectation that their participation will be

* Junior Professional (Academic), Institute of Educational Development, BRAC University

** Former Student, Institute of Education and Research, University of Dhaka

welcomed, their choices supported, their contributions valued and their integrity safeguarded” (Frazee 2003, p. 15).

UNESCO (2008) describe a dialectic relationship between educational inclusion and social inclusion:

...even though education can contribute to promoting equality of opportunities among people to insert them into society, a minimum level of social equity is also necessary to achieve democratization in the access to knowledge. This would allow all people to acquire the competencies required to participate in the different areas of social life. (p.12)

Inclusive school promotes “a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures and communities, and reducing exclusion within and from education” (UNESCO, 2005, p. 13). “An inclusive school has no selection mechanisms or discrimination of any kind. Instead, it transforms its pedagogical proposal into ways of integrating the diversity of students, thus fostering social cohesion, which is one of the main goals of education” (UNESCO, 2008, p.11).

Booth (2002) emphasizes ‘participation’ in relation to social inclusion:

Participation in education involves going beyond access. It implies learning alongside others and collaborating with them in shared lessons. It involves active engagement with what is learnt and taught, and having a say in how education is experienced. But participation also involves being recognised for oneself and being accepted for oneself. I participate with you, when you recognise me as a person like yourself, and accept me for who I am. (p. 2)

In a school to discover students’ participation, ‘classroom’ is and should be the most important locus. The classroom is described as “immediate environments of a child [that] significantly impact directly and indirectly on his/her learning” (Rietveld, 2004, p.2). Social inclusion in the classroom means participation and belongingness of each and every child in all activities of the class where s/he can makes valued contribution and receives necessary supports from the classmates and the teachers. Social inclusion requires practices in education (school and classroom) to “respond to the diversity of learning needs, regardless of their social origin, culture or individual characteristics” (UNESCO, 2008, p.11).

The aim of inclusive education is to remove social exclusion (Vitello & Mithaug, 1998). “It aims to enable both teachers and learners to feel comfortable with diversity and to see it as a challenge and enrichment in the learning environment, rather than a problem” (UNESCO, 2003, p.7). Ahmed noted that “Classrooms are diverse in terms of the types of children and the ways in which they learn. Children learn in different ways because of experience, environment and socio-economic and cultural backgrounds” (Ahmed, 2010 p.11). Issues of educational inclusion and exclusion obviously have implications for policy and practice. These are currently approached by “specific means by policy-makers, researchers and practitioners, to explain complex school and classroom realities and to provide frameworks for addressing a diversity of students’ needs” (Popa & Cozma, 2009 p.2). In this situation, “it

is important to ask ourselves if education is really contributing to the development of more inclusive societies or if, on the contrary, it is reproducing the social exclusion and generating different forms of discrimination within education systems” (UNESCO, 2008, p.11). Also it is necessary to be “vigilant in scrutinising how deficit assumptions may be influencing perceptions of certain students” (Ainscow, 2004, p.8). Despite research (Doveston & Keenaghan, 2006; Ainscow, Booth & Dyson, 2006) carried out to understand social inclusion, not much has been found about measuring the perception of students about social inclusion in the classroom. In this context, the present study focuses on measuring social inclusion in the classroom of secondary schools in Bangladesh. The study also aims to test an instrument (Rinta et al, 2011) empirically in order to investigate its validity and reliability in Bangladeshi context to measure social inclusion in the educational settings.

The Social Inclusion Assessment Instrument

Social Inclusion Assessment Instrument (SIAI) (Rinta et al., 2011) was developed to assess social inclusion among children. The study engaged 110 8-11 year-old children in the United Kingdom and Finland. The study suggested that the new instrument can be used in educational settings with children when assessing their feelings of social inclusion (Rinta et al., 2011). After an extensive literature review the research team found different aspects for measuring social inclusion effectively. A pilot test was conducted using a pilot instrument for combining and assessing different aspects of social inclusion. The final version of the instrument includes a balanced sample of items that measured ‘key elements (integration, emotional inclusion, belongingness, loneliness, participation, contentment and motivation) that construct the concept of social inclusion.’

Table 1 Items that constitute the Social Inclusion Assessment Instrument and the attributes that they assess (Rinta et al., 2011, p. 39-40)

Attribute	Items on instrument	Source
Social integration	‘I have lots of friends in school.’ ‘I have lots of friends outside school.’ ‘Saying goodbye to friends is hard if I know I will not see them for a while.’ ‘I can be sure my friends will take my side if I have an argument.’ ‘I feel I belong in my class at school.’	Haerbelin et al., 1989
Emotional inclusion	‘It is important for me to have friends.’ ‘It is important for me that other children like me.’ ‘I feel left out of things at school.’ ‘My friends always give me help if I need it.’	Haerbelin et al., 1989

Attribute	Items on instrument	Source
Belongingness	‘I feel I belong to my neighbourhood.’ ‘Other children are pleased for me to join their games.’ ‘I would feel sad if I had to leave my school.’	Leary et al., 2005
Loneliness	‘I am never lonely.’ ‘It is important to me to have friends I can turn to at any time.’ ‘I get asked to take part in activities out of school.’ ‘I get along well with children in my class.’	Asher and Wheeler, 1985
Participation	‘I like spending time on my own.’ ‘Other children ask me to play with them.’ ‘I prefer to be on my own and not with other people.’ ‘I prefer doing schoolwork on my own, not in a group.’ ‘I like doing activities that involve lots of children.’	Odena, 2007
Contentment	‘The children in my class are very friendly.’ ‘Other children like me just the way I am.’	Dollase and Koch, 2002; Foundoulaki And Alexopoulo, 2004
Motivation	‘I like going to school.’ ‘I like to see my school friends outside school.’ ‘It is more important to have a few close friends than trying to be friends with everybody.’	Baumeister et al., 2005; and Koch, 2002; Twenge et al., 2007

Source: Rinta et al., 2011, p. 39-40

A 5-point Likert-style scale was adopted by the research team to generate reliable information from the children. To pilot the instrument in Finland the research team translated the questionnaire into Finnish.

II. Methodology

Instrument:

A 5-point Likert-style scale was developed to measure social inclusion in the classroom of secondary schools according to the original Social Inclusion Assessment Instrument (SIAI) design used by Rinta et al. (2011). A translated version (in Bangla) of the questionnaire was employed to collect opinion from the students of secondary schools. A pilot testing of the tool was done to understand whether the students of secondary schools can respond to the items translated in their mother tongue and if there is any ambiguity to them. The pilot testing was conducted with 20 students who were 11-15 years old.

Respondents and research site:

Considering convenience and time we selected 13 classrooms in 4 schools from 4 districts of Bangladesh purposively. Students (11-15 years old) of the secondary level (Grades VI-X) were asked to participate voluntarily. A total of 438 students participated in the study as presented in the Table 2.

Table 2 Details of respondents

		Grades					Total
		VI	VII	VIII	IX	X	
District	Gazipur	40	35	0	26	0	101
	Dhaka	0	54	0	66	0	120
	Shatkhira	0	49	37	13	0	99
	Bhola	31	15	26	15	31	118
Total		71	153	63	120	31	438

Data collection and analysis:

With permission from the head teacher of the schools, the purpose of collecting the data was explained to the students. The participants remained anonymous. On an average it took 30 minutes for the students to respond to the 26 items of the instrument. We employed SPSS version 16.0 to analyse data to determine the validity and reliability of Social Inclusion Assessment Instrument (SIAI) and to assess the perception of students about social inclusion in the classroom.

Findings

Validity and reliability of Social Inclusion Assessment Instrument (SIAI):

Internal consistency measures and correlation analysis were employed to validate the SIAI's use in Bangladeshi secondary schools for measuring social inclusion. To measure the internal consistency reliability of 26 items translated (in Bangla) SIAI we assessed Cronbach's alpha measure. The Cronbach's alpha for the instrument used in the study was 0.72. It showed high internal consistency and reliability for the items (Morgan et al., 2004). Cronbach's alpha was also high or equal to the accepted level for separate data sets from four schools in four districts. Table 3 below shows the findings.

Table 3 Internal Consistency of the Instrument for the participating schools in four districts

District	Cronbach's alpha	Interpretation
Gazipur	0.70	a = 0.70
Dhaka	0.78	a > 0.70
Shatkhira	0.74	a > 0.70
Bhola	0.70	a = 0.70
Total	0.72	a > 0.70

For analysing each of the seven attributes within the questionnaire correlation analyses were used. We calculated Pearson Correlation separately for each of the attributes which indicate significant correlation among items. Correlations were also run with pairs of items for different attributes of social inclusion. Table 4 illustrates some of the correlations which were found most significant ($p < 0.01$) for different attributes.

Table 4 Pairs of items that generated statistically most significant correlations

Attribute	Items	Correlation*
Social Integration	“I feel I belong in my class at school” “I can be sure my friends will take my side if I have an argument”	.000
Emotional Inclusion	It is important for me to have friends It is important for me that other children like me	.003
Belongingness	I feel I belong to my neighbourhood I would feel sad if I had to leave my school	.003
Loneliness	I am never lonely I get along well with children in my class	.000
Participation	Other children ask me to play with them I like doing activities that involve lots of children	.005
Containment	The children in my class are very friendly Other children like me just the way I am	.000
Motivation	I like going to school I like to see my school friends outside school	.000

*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Perception of the students about social inclusion in the classroom:

Mean scores and standard deviations were calculated to understand students’ perception about their social inclusion in the classrooms. Table 5 illustrates their perception in different attributes of social inclusion. The study employed a five-point scale where the scores of the responses were 5 (strongly agree), 4 (agree), 3 (undecided), 2 (disagree) and 1 (strongly disagree), respectively. As the mean scores for each of the attribute is more than 3.00 and for all attributes is 3.66, they show that students were largely agreed that they are socially included in the classrooms. The mean score for participation is low (3.05) than other attributes and it is the highest for motivation (4.07). These indicate that students were ambivalent about their degree of participation in the classroom; at the same time, they had a positive attitude about school.

Table 5 Students' perception about Social Inclusion

Attributes	Number of Items (N)	Mean (M)	Standard deviation (SD)
Social Integration	5	3.52	1.24
Emotional Inclusion	4	3.70	1.15
Belongingness	3	3.88	1.15
Loneliness	4	3.84	1.17
Participation	5	3.05	1.25
Containment	2	3.53	1.27
Motivation	3	4.07	1.15
Total	26	3.66	

On the other hand standard deviations for all of the attributes are more than 1.00 for a five point scale. This variability reveals that some students feel more included in the classroom and some feel excluded in the same context.

Table 6 Social inclusion in the participating schools of four districts

District	Mean (M)	Standard deviation (SD)
Gazipur	3.61	1.18
Dhaka	3.58	1.11
Shatkhira	3.62	1.22
Bhola	3.58	1.16

III. Discussion and Conclusion

The instrument for social inclusion developed by Rinta et al., (2011) suggested a way to assess the concept of social inclusion. It covered the psychological and sociological factors relevant for constructing the concept of inclusion.. As with the original instrument, the Bangla version was found child-friendly and easy for children to handle in the schools of Bangladesh.

As the present study found, internal validity and reliability of the Bangla instrument is acceptable. Researchers, teachers and other professionals can use this protocol to assess the level of social inclusion in the classrooms for students. This protocol is also appropriate for assessing the level of individual social inclusion of a student in his/her context.

The study found that students, on average, are inclined towards agreeing that they are socially included in the classrooms, though there is significant variability in their perception. Some of the students in a classroom have a strong feeling of being included and integrated in the classroom; while some also strongly feel being excluded.

It can be argued that the average positive score regarding perception of inclusion is less significant educationally than less variability in perception. The goal of a school should be to combat any discriminatory attitudes that may create a perception among students of not being included. The aim should be to create a welcoming environment in school for all children and build an inclusive society. (UNESCO, 1994). The limitation of the study was that it covered a relatively small sample from purposively selected schools. Further studies should be conducted on a larger scale along with classroom activities observation to find out the extent to which initiatives can be taken to remove barriers to establishing an environment in the classrooms for social inclusion.

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