

Beliefs of Pre-Service Teacher Education Institutional Heads About Inclusive Education in Bangladesh

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Abstract

This paper investigates beliefs about inclusive education of heads of higher education institutions that offer pre-service teacher preparation programs in Bangladesh. Since 2003, Bangladesh started including children with diverse needs in regular schools in both primary and secondary education. However, pre-service teacher preparation institutions are not yet fully ready to prepare teachers for a diverse classroom. In this journey of education reform, heads of the institutions that are offering pre-service teacher education in Bangladesh have a key role in better preparing future teachers for inclusive education. A thematic analysis procedure was administered on 22 institutional heads using a semi-structured interview guide. Themes extracted from the interview data were reforming teacher education programs, providing additional assistance during practicum, importance of pre-service teachers' motivations in relation to their profession, meeting all children's learning needs in the same class, awareness about equal right to education and concerns about including children with severe disabilities. Implications of the findings for further improving the pre-service teacher education programs in Bangladesh are also discussed.

Key Words: Pre-service teacher education, Inclusive education, Beliefs, Bangladesh.

I. Introduction

“I sing of equality.
There's nothing greater than a human being,
nothing nobler!
Caste, creed, religion--there's no difference.
Throughout all ages, all places,
we're all a manifestation
of our common humanity”.

(Kazi Nazrul Islam's poetry 'Human Being' in Huda, 2000, p. 266-268)

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Inclusive education is premised on a philosophy of educational reform that gives the highest priority to equal right to education for all people irrespective of their diverse circumstances, as pronounced in UNESCO's Salamanca Declaration (UNESCO, 1994). Bangladesh, like many other countries, is moving towards inclusive education. Bangladesh is the signatory of a number of international agreements such as Education For All - EFA 1990 (UNESCO, 1990), Salamanca Framework of Action (UNESCO, 1994), Dakar Framework for Action (UNESCO, 2000) and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN, 2008). In line with these international accords, Bangladesh has taken several policy initiatives to promote inclusive education. The most recent national education policy statement known as the Education Policy 2010 recognises inclusive education as a strategy to ensure education for all citizens (Ministry of Education [MOE], 2010). In addition, large scale projects like the Second Primary Education Development Program (PEDP II) at primary level and Teaching Quality Improvement in Secondary Education Project (TQI-SEP) at secondary level have components of inclusive education (Ahsan & Burnip, 2007).

Education Policy 2010 proposed that one of the aims of teacher training programs is to ensure equal access of children to education irrespective of social class, gender, religion, and ethnicity. It also called for developing strategies to meet in the same classroom the learning needs of all children with their diverse background and circumstances (MOE, 2010). Similar to these initiatives in Bangladesh, developing countries like India (Alur, 2009; Sharma & Deppeler, 2005; Singal, 2005), Brazil (Santos & Silva, 2009), Tanzania (Grönlund, Lim & Larsson, 2010) and South Africa (Daniels, 2010; Naylor, 2009) have also taken policy initiatives in favour of inclusive education. It is evident that developing countries are adopting policies in support of inclusive education, but they face challenges in effective implementation of these policies. One significant area that deserves attention in this regard is how higher education institutions that offer pre-service programmes prepare teachers for inclusive education.

Vital to the success of Education for All is teacher quality. An extensive research literature provides evidence that teacher quality is the single most important variable for influencing student achievement (Gustafsson, 2003; OECD, 2005). Pre-service teacher education builds for future teachers the base of knowledge and skills and prepares them to face challenges related to their profession (Wilke, 2004). Research also suggests that pre-service teacher education is the best time to develop positive sentiments and minimize concern about inclusive education among pre-service teachers (Loreman, Sharma, Forlin & Earle, 2005; Sharma, Forlin, Loreman, & Earle, 2006). The Salamanca declaration articulated the importance of teacher preparation for successful implementation of inclusive education, as stated in Article 41:

Pre-service training programmes should provide to all student teachers, primary and secondary alike, positive orientation toward disability, thereby developing an understanding of what can be achieved in schools with locally available support

services. The knowledge and skills required are mainly those of good teaching and include assessing special needs, adapting curriculum content, utilizing assistive technology, individualizing teaching procedures to suit a larger range of abilities, etc. In teacher-training practice schools, specific attention should be given to preparing all teachers to exercise their autonomy and apply their skills in adapting curricula and instruction to meet pupils' needs as well as to collaborate with specialists and co-operate with parents. (UNESCO, 1994: 27)

Positive impact of well-planned pre-service teacher education programs designed for diversity in classroom were reported by several research studies conducted in Australia (Carrington, Deppeler & Moss, 2010) and USA (Gettinger, Stoiber & Kosciak, 2008). Some studies also identified various concerns of pre-service teachers in facing classroom diversity. For example, inadequate resource support during pre-service teacher education programs were identified as a barrier to teacher preparation in studies conducted in India (Sharma, Moore and Sonawane, 2009) and Hong Kong (Chong, Forlin & Lan, 2007). Other studies (Chai, Teo & Lee, 2009; Chong et al., 2007) reported short course length as a challenge to preparing pre-service teachers properly. In other Indian studies (Alur, 2001; Sharma & Deppeler, 2005; Singal, 2005) lack of resources; negative beliefs and attitudes towards the concept of inclusive education and inadequate training of teachers were identified as significant barriers towards implementing inclusive education.

According to an OECD (2009) study, it is vital to understand teachers' beliefs, attitudes and practices if we wish to improve the status of any education system. Although a number of studies have been conducted on pre-service teachers' beliefs and attitudes towards inclusive education, the beliefs and attitudes of the heads of the higher teacher education institutions have not received much research attention.

Researchers have identified various issues related to new responsibilities of higher education institutions in the context of an inclusive, diversity-focused pre-service teacher education. Suggestions have been made (Booth et al., 2003; Burstein et. al, 1999; Campbell & Fyfe, 1995; Jangira, 1995; Price & Valli, 1998) about redesigning and reforming the existing teacher education curriculum for meeting the demands of inclusive education. However, changing only the curriculum may not prepare pre-service teachers adequately. Booth et al. (2003) in their edited book titled *Developing Inclusive Teacher Education* noted that teacher education institutions have to develop variety of favourable inclusion friendly policies for maintaining a favourable, flexible and inclusive environment inside the institution. This policy development idea was also echoed in other studies (Forlin et al., 1999; Melnick & Zeichner, 1998).

Ensuring a quality and diversity focused practicum experience (Burstein et. al, 1999), development of collaborative roles between universities and schools as well as among different professional groups (Booth et al., 2003; Burstein et. al, 1999; Campbell & Fyfe,

1995; Melnick & Zeichner, 1998) and positive attitudes of teacher educators towards these new changes (Booth et al., 2003; Forlin et al., 1999) were identified as some other required initiatives of higher education institutions to implement quality teacher preparation for inclusive education. It is evident that for bringing such changes in the higher education institution, the role and responsibility of the institutional head, who is in a leadership position, and beliefs and attitudes that motivate him or her, are of critical importance.

Many countries which have embarked on teacher education reforms have faced various challenges in preparing pre-service teachers' for inclusive education through their revised programs. Research conducted in countries like Cyprus (Angelides, Stylianou & Gibbs, 2006), USA (Harvey, Yssel, Bauserman & Merbler, 2010), and Hong Kong (Forlin, 2010) have revealed that the curriculum structures and instructional strategies might not be preparing teachers who would be confident to teach in inclusive classrooms.

Studies by Angelides et al. (2006) and Harvey et al. (2010) found that teacher educators themselves were unclear about their roles in meeting demands of inclusive education through practicum experiences, resource mobilization and collaborative training initiatives promoted for preparing pre-service teachers. A Cyprus study on preparing pre-service teachers through higher education institutions conducted by Angelides et al. (2006) reported that though higher education institutions were claiming that they were preparing teachers for a broadly conceived inclusive education approach, pre-service teachers saw this as confined to special education (i.e. deviant, abnormal, special needs) in their lesson plans. It appears that a curriculum based on a "medical model" acted as a barrier to changing pre-service teachers' beliefs towards inclusive education. Therefore, understanding of a teacher preparation curriculum by the teacher educators to make it genuinely inclusive is necessary.

What constitutes a good pre-service teacher education curriculum with positive impact on teacher preparation remains an issue (Lancaster & Bain 2007, 2010; Oh et al., 2010; Sari, Çeliköz & Seçer, 2008; Woodcock, 2008). Insertion of inclusive education related topic in the pre-service teacher education curriculum may not solve the problem. As Angelides et al. (2006)'s noted, the Government's rigid policies towards maintaining curriculum contents were not inclusive-friendly and drove teacher educators to teach subject matters in a traditional manner. This study further reveals that gaps between theories taught in the universities and practices in the practicum schools were also barriers to preparing teachers properly. These concerns point to the importance of a holistic change in the teacher education institutions along with changes in curriculum components. Pro-active leadership is vital in the teacher preparation institution to bring such reforms.

Fullan (1993) suggested that any educational innovation or reform demands new skills, changes in belief and as a consequence, changes in behavioral aspects as well. Research studies have shown that teachers' beliefs about teaching-learning are formed in the very early stage of their career and they may be rigid about changing such beliefs (Kagan, 1992;

Munby, 1982). Pajares (1992) argued that beliefs of teachers influence their judgments and perceptions that ultimately affect their professional preparation. Success of higher education institutions in addressing these challenges through teacher preparation for inclusive reforms is very much dependent on the beliefs and roles of the heads of those institutions. This is because leadership has been identified as an important component for addressing such change (Price & Valli, 1998). As Fullan (2002) suggests, "Leaders have a deeper and more lasting influence on organizations and provide more comprehensive leadership if their focus extends beyond maintaining high standards" (p.17). Leadership is an important component to bring new changes in a process (Kouzes & Posner, 1987) and adapt new understandings and ideas through skill development (Senge, 1996). Even a single leadership role can promote change in an organization (Reeves, 2004). Inclusive reform initiatives in the higher education institutions that are preparing pre-service teachers have to start from the leadership positions for its acceptance to others. Heads need to play the role of an inclusive leader to bring inclusion friendly change in their institutions.

Bangladesh like many other countries throughout the world is attempting to address the inequities in access and quality in the education system. Though the Government started implementing inclusive education since 2003, the primary level teacher preparation curriculum was not revised to address diversity (Munir & Islam, 2005; NAPE, 2001). The secondary level teacher preparation curriculum was last revised in 2006 and inclusive education philosophy was embedded in different parts of the new curriculum (National University, 2006). The National Education Policy (2010) chapter on teacher training that discussed both pre-service and in-service teacher education (Chapter 24) stated that:

Existing teacher training programs in Bangladesh is very traditional, incomplete, certificate-oriented, theory-based, providing less practical opportunities, rote-learning based and following traditional assessment system. Therefore, we are not getting a satisfactory outcome through this. (MOE, 2010, p. 56).

Munir and Islam's (2005) study on the review of the primary level pre-service teacher preparation curriculum for inclusive education revealed that absence of inclusive education related information in the curriculum, traditional teaching learning approaches and rote learning based assessment systems were principal barriers to preparing teachers adequately for inclusive education. Ahuja and Ibrahim's (2006) study conducted for UNESCO that evaluated the state of inclusive education in Bangladesh also reported that pre-service teacher education programs were not enabling teachers to be competent and confident for inclusive classrooms.

Institutional heads have specific roles and responsibilities in Bangladesh, as elsewhere, in implementing reform. These include administrative roles within institutions, resource mobilization, management of pre-service and in-service training, and overseeing day-to-day operations. How the head of the institution carries out these multiple roles and functions is

influenced by personal beliefs, attitudes and values, which ultimately may determine if the reforms succeed or fail.

II. Teacher beliefs and pre-service teacher education

Beliefs have been considered one of the important elements in teacher education. They constitute a complicated construct due to their very nature which do not lend themselves easily to empirical investigation (Pajares, 1992). Kagan (1992)'s and Pajares (1992)' pointed out that teacher beliefs bear different labels, such as, opinion, concept, attitudes, perspectives, orientations and more. Pre-service teachers bring into the program beliefs of their own about teaching. Kagan (1992)'s study showed that pre-service teachers hold a personal view of a good teacher, they possess their own identity as a teacher and also embrace their own memories in school life that shape their beliefs about their profession. These beliefs influence their thoughts in two major areas: towards teaching-learning approaches and towards teacher education programs.

Smylie (1988)'s pathway analysis study found that teachers' beliefs are the most important indicator of their change through the teacher education program. Beliefs about teaching-learning approaches are formed prior to their entrance to the program and tend to remain unchanged (Pajares, 1992). Nespor (1987)'s and Kagan (1992)'s study revealed that though pre-service teachers are exposed to new information and knowledge in the program, they tend to retain their preconceived beliefs.

Most pre-service teachers' have certain ideas about the efficacy of their teaching abilities. (Richards & Killen, 1994). In the beginning of the program pre-service teachers express more traditional, behaviourist, control oriented approach to teaching learning, as they believe that maintaining classroom discipline is the most important part of good teaching. Most pre-service teachers showed less attention to theories discussed in the program as they thought that real learning would take place during practicum (Jaram & Gabrielle, 1998; Wubbels, 1992). If the teacher preparation program provides the opportunity, they tend to become more constructivist gradually (Mansour, 2009; Yilmaz & Sahin, 2011).

Kagan (1992) added that beliefs are a kind of personal knowledge that is based on assumptions which often guide teachers' behaviour, whereas knowledge is based on objective truth and fact. Pajares (1992) and Richardson (1996) suggested that teachers have to be challenged by real-life problems to change their pre-existing beliefs. Bandura's (1997) social cognitive theory also mentions four influences on changing a person's beliefs: vicarious experience that relates to feeling of personal success, role-modelling that includes observing other peoples' success, emotional arousal and verbal persuasion. Therefore, key people like institutional heads and teacher educators in the pre-service teacher education programs have to ensure that trainees are challenged to face and assess reality, thus becoming receptive to new ideas and accepting of the need for change.

This study was undertaken to understand beliefs of institutional heads about inclusive education. More specifically we were interested in finding out these key stakeholders' perceptions about how adequately pre-service programs prepared teachers to teach in inclusive classrooms in Bangladesh. We were also interested in finding out their perceptions about what could be done to further improve teacher education programs.

III. Methodology

A qualitative methodology was followed to gain a comprehensive understanding of the beliefs and views of the institutional heads (IH) in relation to the implementation of inclusive education in Bangladesh. A semi-structured face-to-face interview schedule was designed that allowed researchers to create good rapport with the interviewee as well as keeping the interview on the right track to get quality data. Questions were open-ended and researchers had freedom to change the approach of questioning according to the demands of the interview situation, as the value of this flexibility was seen in the literature on research methods (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007; Creswell, 2008).

The questions in the interview schedule were based upon the researchers' judgement about issues that helped researchers extract belief related information from the interviewees. Interview principles followed Brenner (1981)'s guidelines that allowed researchers to present all questions in an established language developed in the schedule so that comparisons could be made among the responses. Prompt questions were asked to get further clarifications, respondents' comprehension of the questions were checked if it was required and also repeated, if asked. Interviewees had freedom not to answer any question, and no explanation was given that might influence the responses. Respondents were assured of avoiding confidential information in the recording of the interviews and in the research report.

Participants

Heads (i.e. Deans/Directors of the Faculty in universities; Principals of Teachers' Training Colleges; and heads of Primary Teachers' Training Institutes known as 'superintendents') of the higher education institutions that offer pre-service teacher education in Bangladesh were selected as participants of this study. Interviewees were selected from three types of institutions; Primary Teachers' Training Institutes (PTIs), government Teachers' Training Colleges (TTCs) and universities.

Bangladesh is divided into six administrative divisions (Dhaka, Chittagong, Rajshahi, Sylhet, Barisal and Khulna). To get representation of all six divisions, the Director General (DG) of the Directorate of Primary Education (DPE) was requested to select six PTIs from the six divisions out of 55 PTIs all over Bangladesh. The heads of the selected six PTIs were interviewed for this study. In addition to heads of those six institutions at primary level, two additional institutional heads were selected to participate in the study: the head of the Inclusive Education Cell of the DPE and the Director General of National Academy for

Primary Education (NAPE). These two institutions played a significant role in primary level pre-service teacher preparation curriculum development and in running teacher educator development programs.

Similarly, the DG of the Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education (DSHE) was requested to select six TTCs out of fourteen government TTCs following the same criteria that all six administrative divisions would be covered. The heads of the six TTCs were interviewed for this study.

In addition, Deans/Directors of the Education Faculty/Department of all eight universities recognized by the University Grants Commission (UGC) that offer pre-service teacher preparation programs at secondary level were interviewed. Information about these institutions was collected from the University Grants Commission (UGC) web page.

In total, twenty two (22) heads were interviewed. Table 1 provides details of the participants:

Table 1: Participants of the Study

Level of Pre-service Teacher Education Programs	Type of Institutions	Number of Heads	Total Number
Primary	Primary Teachers' Training Institutes (PTIs)	6	8
	Inclusive Education Cell, Directorate of Primary Education, MOE	1	
	National Academy for Primary Education (NAPE)	1	
Secondary	Teachers' Training Colleges	6	14
	Universities that offer pre-service teacher education	8	
Grand Total (N)			22

Data analysis

Interviewees were asked to sign a consent form. Identities of all the interviewees were kept anonymous. Interviews were audio-taped with the written permission of the participants. All interview data were transcribed in Bangla language. The transcriptions were e-mailed to the participants and revised based on their feedback (Brantlinger et al., 2005).

A thematic analysis was used to analyse the transcribed documents and themes were extracted from the data through coding (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). While coding and analyzing the data, transcriptions in Bangla language were used to get the exact meaning of vocabularies used by the interviewees. In the end, all the analysed data were translated into English. Some issues appeared repetitively in the interviews (e.g., reforming teacher

education programs, assistance during practicum, and meeting all children's learning needs in the same class). Those were coded and similar codes were grouped by generating hierarchy trees. Themes were then derived from the grouped codes.

The key aims of the study and the literature review guided the researchers' analysis of the interview findings. To reconcile apparently contradictory data, interpretive and reflexive interview listening and reading procedures (Denzin, 2001; Power, 2004) were followed. This technique allowed researchers to re-listen the recording to consider the intonation and voice quality, re-read the transcriptions, rethink the personal characteristics of the respondent, such as, social status, gender and positions of the interviewees in a specific country context, recall the facial expressions and also analyse the physical environment of the interview sessions to understand the exact meaning of the contradictory information.

IV. Results

The participants' expressed opinions were used to explore their beliefs about inclusive education. The themes that emerged from their responses indicating their beliefs can be categorized under six headings, as presented below.

Necessity of reforming teacher education program

When respondents were asked about the capability of the present pre-service teachers to teach in an inclusive classroom, majority of the participants believed that these trainee teachers were not ready to teach in inclusive classrooms. They believed that it would be possible only if adequate training was provided during their pre-service teacher education stage.

“I do not think it would be possible for existing pre-service teachers to teach in an inclusive classroom. If they are trained adequately, then it is possible”. (IH-09)

Interviewees believed that to prepare teachers properly for inclusive classrooms the existing pre-service teacher preparation curricula required rigorous revision including review of existing practicum provisions in the curriculum. Interviewees reported that inclusive education issues were not addressed properly in the curriculum and in some cases, a few items were added in an existing chapter. For example, one interviewee mentioned that only disability related information was included in the name of inclusive education reform at the university level pre-service teacher training programs:

The Ministry of Education (MOE) through the University Grants Commission (UGC) sent us a letter to include information about teaching strategies for children with disabilities in the existing pre-service teacher education curriculum. We could not revise the whole curriculum in response to that letter. What we did was that we included a unit in the Methods of Teaching course. (IH-01)

Another participant mentioned about the primary level pre-service teacher preparation curriculum: “We have some information in the educational psychology course. But it is not

sufficiently elaborate; so more information is needed” (IH-05) A majority of the participants expressed their concerns about the current status of preparedness of pre-service teachers for inclusive education.

Assistance during practicum

The participants agreed that in addition to adequate preparation in universities, pre-service teachers would also require extensive support at the time of undertaking their teaching practicum, both in and out of classrooms.

Interviewees were concerned that pre-service teachers are not getting a sound practicum experience as part of their training. One reason identified by many interviewees was that schools to which the trainee teachers were sent did not have any orientation on inclusive education in most cases. As a result, they did not enrol children from disadvantaged backgrounds and pre-service teachers could not experience a diversity focused inclusive classroom. One participant mentioned:

They are not getting an experience of an inclusive school. Opportunities are much less in rural schools...schools are not ready yet for inclusive education. More awareness raising is needed for that. (IH-12)

Interviewees demanded more assistance at school level for a teacher to perform effectively in an inclusive classroom. While including children with special needs in the regular classroom, participants indicated that these classrooms needed support in respect of accessibility of facilities, assistive devices, primary care and special care in the classroom.

... in the school [during practicum] there must be special arrangement for children with visual or hearing impairment. For example sitting arrangement, teaching materials, and blackboard should be appropriate for all children. (IH-02)

The need for additional support in the practicum classroom for pre-service trainees was echoed by other participants as well:

[Inclusion of diverse children] means one teacher will teach all of them. So the (pre-service) teachers should be well-trained and have endurance. It is really very tough and challenging to teach different types of children in a classroom and in that case the teacher should be very experienced. Nevertheless, there would be lots of obstacles as there would be children with disabilities. These children would need one type of behavioral support or teaching method and the general students would need other ones. I think it is very difficult to create different types of teaching environment at the same time. (IH-20).

Additional teaching materials and educational material support were also mentioned by interviewees. Pre-service teachers are placed in regular schools during their practicum and normally these classes are very large in size. The need for reducing the large class size was frequently mentioned by the participants.

In Bangladesh, both primary and secondary classrooms are crowded. Student-teacher ratio is on an average 67:01. In such situation, it is not possible for a pre-service teacher to adjust themselves to the children with special needs. So they follow a general teaching-learning approach for all students. (IH-07).

You may see that in some cases ratio is one teacher to 100 students. So, it becomes very difficult for the teachers to teach them even the general subject matters. I think it is not possible for poor teachers to meet the demands of all children including children with special needs. I think it may be possible only if we recruit more teachers and increase the facilities and number of classrooms. (IH-01).

Interviewees suggested increasing teacher number and physical facilities to solve the problem. Classroom assistance theme also included the demands of interviewees for primary care or early intervention support before bringing children from disadvantaged backgrounds into regular classrooms:

It depends somewhat upon what is meant by different kinds of children. The socially disadvantaged children who are actually occupied in child labour, you can include them in a regular school and that should be done, I suppose. But those [Children] with physical problems, there is need for a second thought about this. They should be provided some sort of primary care first. (IH-09).

Pre-service teachers' motivation

Participants mentioned about teachers' personal motivational issues for effective implementation of the values of inclusive education.

Teachers are the most important persons for imparting education. They will do everything [required for improving the classroom environment]... Teachers must have a proper pre-service training and motivation for doing that will develop their insight. In the end, I think a teacher [after attending pre-service training] should treat all the students in the same way and should like all of them. (IH-02).

Respondents also believed that those people who have an aptitude for teaching should be recruited in this profession. Some said that they found many teachers in the pre-service programs who had little interest in teaching and came to the course just to take the certificate for getting promotion or to receive an increment in salary. They also reported that many pre-service teachers were preparing themselves for other professions or were involved in other professions as well while they were in the program. They suggested redesigning the primary school teacher recruitment process so that only motivated people were recruited in teaching profession and sent to the pre-service teacher preparation programs.

Government or private organizations who recruit teachers, have to recruit qualified teachers, identifying those who choose teaching as a profession. People genuinely interested in teaching should be brought into the profession. They could get other good jobs if they wanted, but would not go for that, as they wanted to do only teaching. (IH-01).

Meeting all children's learning needs in the same class

Interviewees believed that traditional teaching-learning approaches have to be changed in preparing pre-service teachers properly. One interviewee pointed out that traditional beliefs of pre-service teachers about teaching-learning approaches were sometimes found to be very strong. Those strong preconceived beliefs may not change during teacher preparation programs. The respondent gave importance on changing motivation of the pre-service teachers through the training program.

Only training will not work, the teachers also have to apply that properly in the classroom. Most of the time we can see that after going to the classroom the teachers do not apply their training and teach the students by using traditional method. So what's the need of training? I think teachers' motivation have to be changed first [through pre-service teacher education], so that they treat all the students in the same manner and apply their learning gained during training. (IH-02).

It was noteworthy that some institutional heads themselves believed in the traditional approaches of teaching-learning. Their statements in the course of the interviews revealed that several issues influenced such beliefs. Expressions used by the respondents such as 'problems of disability', 'less IQ', 'normal child and special child' and so on clearly indicated their beliefs supporting the medical model of disability.

The following statement is an example of the inclination of some of the institutional heads towards the medical model of disability that views limitations of children with special needs first, rather than their potentials, and compares them with typical abilities of so called 'normal' children:

Well... yes, various sorts of challenges, not only about the classroom or courses but many others, regarding aspects of diversity come in front of us. For example, we can notice that there are children with different special needs; some have hearing impairment, some cannot speak, some have visual impairment, and other physical disabilities, or may have some other conditions like less IQ or mental retardation. As every individual has specific problems, so it is without any doubt a great challenge for the teacher to teach such pupils simultaneously in the same manner as the normal children. (IH-03).

Similar response was also found in the statement of IH-04:

I do not think it is possible [for a regular teacher to support all children in a diverse classroom]. As they teach normal pupils, their way of teaching may not be appropriate for the students with special needs. And, therefore, they will not be able to teach either in the right way. So this [inclusive] procedure may prove to be harmful for both [normal and those with special needs] types of students. I would say that it is better not to practice inclusion" (IH-04).

The respondent was strongly opposed to the concept of inclusive education, “Actually in Bangladesh, we don’t have the facilities to teach [diverse children] in the same classroom. So I don’t support it” (IH 04). The respondent also feels that segregated education approaches are better for some groups: “Yes, I think it will be much more effective to educate them separately if we have the facilities.” The segregated traditional teaching-learning approaches were also supported by another interviewee:

There is difference in language and culture [among students]. So, I think if a specialized system can be offered for them [with special needs] then it will be better. For example, all children with hearing impairment can be provided with a special environment with a special teacher and in the same way it can be done for the children with visual impairment also. There is a psychological difference among the children. So it will be better if we can make such arrangement for them. (IH-15).

Equal right to access in education

Some participants had very positive beliefs towards the values of inclusive education and urged realization of equal right of all children to education. For example:

My opinion is that those who are disadvantaged, in the sense that they are deprived at home and in society as well, should be identified. They have grown up without love since childhood and have not received any care from anywhere. They are a large group in our society. I want to thank the government for the effort to bring them into the mainstream. If we do not do so, a large group in society will stay deprived. Those, whom we think as our burden, can become our wealth. More facilities in the classroom can bring them into the mainstream. (IH-17).

Equal right to access in education was echoed in the following comment:

Approximately, 35% of our population is below poverty level; the children of this segment, almost all, drop out due to poverty, language and some other reasons. In such cases, the first target of inclusive education is to ensure their access and maintain the quality of primary education. Moreover, to ensure access of the children in special circumstances, attention is needed to groups such as the fishermen, ethnic communities/tribes, or nomadic children who live on boats in Barisal district. (IH-18).

It appears that the participants were familiar with the issues in inclusive education due to different government initiatives recently taken in favour of inclusive education. The above statements are a reflection of these policy and program initiatives.

“Inclusion not good for children with severe disability”

Some institutional heads were concerned about including children with severe disabilities in the inclusive education programs. Special education was prescribed by those interviewees

for children with all types of severe disabilities. For example, an institution head said, “There could be some problems in including children with intellectual disabilities in the regular education. There should be separate streams of education facilities for them, especially, for those who have severe special needs” (IH-18).

Similarly, IH-22 commented:

My opinion is that the people whom we consider as the low-income group in the context of socio-economic condition should not suffer any discrimination in education. It is a must to ensure education for the children of the poor and illiterate with the children of the rich and literate and the classroom should be same. Second thing is that we should also bring the children with special needs in the same classroom. But there should be a limit, because children with severe disability would not be advantaged by this; but children with mild disability can benefit from inclusive education. (IH-22).

One interviewee raised another important issue of parental concern, especially in the urban areas, in including children with special needs in the regular classroom:

Well, inclusion of all kinds of students in a school may not be the right way. Especially, in the urban areas where many of the parents are from higher class in society; there may be resistance from them - not being interested in accepting their children studying with the children with special needs. But it may be possible in the rural areas. (IH-04).

Difference in the context of rural and urban school settings were also mentioned by other participants. A large number of participants see the concept of inclusive education as including only children with disabilities in the regular education. When they were asked to express their opinion about inclusive education, they commented only about issues related to inclusion only of children with disabilities.

V. Discussion and conclusion

Beliefs are significant indicators of teachers’ future actions (Bandura, 1986, 1992; Tschannen-Moran, Hoy & Hoy, 1998). Analysis of the interviews of the institutional heads revealed their beliefs about inclusive education. The findings shed light on what is happening in the teacher education programs and what could be done to further improve this sector to prepare teachers for meeting the challenge of including students with diverse abilities into regular classrooms. No claims are made that the data from the participants present a comprehensive picture of what is happening in Bangladesh teacher education. Information presented in this study does represent views of one group of key stakeholders in primary and secondary teacher education.

Themes extracted from the opinion of the institutional heads indicate that they believed a good quality pre-service teacher preparation program was a pre-requisite of successful

implementation of inclusive education. They were concerned that the existing pre-service teacher training programs were not sufficient to prepare teachers effectively for inclusive education, especially in challenging and re-examining their beliefs in a positive manner. This finding is supported by studies conducted in Australia (Premier and Miller, 2010) and in the Netherlands (Pijl, 2010) that reported insufficiency of course content and recommended revising existing curriculum for addressing the values of inclusive education. Garner (2000) expressed this concern in respect of U.K. arguing for a considerable change in the existing pre-service teacher training course content and in the structure.

A confusion regarding a broad concept of inclusive education, within which disability-related special needs are only one element, and equating inclusive education with education for special needs permeated the responses and clearly influenced the beliefs and attitudes of the respondents. A second source of confusion was a broad concept of special needs that recognises a spectrum of abilities of learners as a natural and normal phenomenon and thinking about disabilities as a special condition represented by the “medical model.” This duality contributed to ambivalence in respondents’ beliefs and perceptions. It appears that the policy and programmatic initiatives taken in primary and secondary education to encourage inclusive education as well as paying attention to “special needs” in the mainstream schools did not articulate or clarify sufficiently the official position. Nor did they examine or elaborate the implications for strategy and action of the varying interpretations of the concepts.

The lack of clarity and absence of consideration of the implications can also be seen in the teacher preparation curricula, program content and their implementation. The new education policy of 2010, while recognising the importance of inclusive education, and the role of teacher preparation for this purpose, did not go further in providing guidelines for conceptual clarity and operational aspects of implementing inclusive education (MOE, 2010). Influence of medical model was also apparent in the curriculum reform initiatives as changes took place in the form of adding some disability related information in a unit of any course in complying with Government’s instruction to the pre-service teacher education institutions for curriculum reform. This situation is similar to the experience of medical-model based curriculum reform initiatives mentioned in the Angelides et al. (2006) study conducted in Cyprus.

Many participants expressed a discomfort and or were uncertain about the right position to take when it came to the situation of children with severe disabilities vis-a-vis their inclusion in the mainstream. Absence of a clear policy stance added to the uncertainty. It was not, therefore surprising that beliefs and attitudes of heads of teacher preparation institutions manifested a degree of confusion and even contradiction. Forlin (1995)’s and Forlin, Loreman, Sharma, & Earle (2009)’s studies also found that teachers and educators were more negative in accepting children with severe disabilities. This was mostly, as mentioned earlier, because of believing in the traditional approaches to teaching learning. Besides,

participants' expression and use of vocabulary during interview such as 'normal pupils' clearly stated that they believed in the concept of medical model of disability. This model tends to consider differing abilities as deviance to be treated and handled separately from the mainstream is justifiably discredited from an educational and human rights point of view (Loreman, Deppeler, & Harvey, 2005) and points out a child's deficits first rather than improving teaching-learning approaches to address all children's needs (Ainscow, 1997).

While there might have been divergent positions about the concept and scope of inclusive education, interviewees generally in agreement about the need for additional resources and support for successful teacher preparation for inclusive classrooms, especially in the practicum part of it. They believed that schools were not ready yet to be inclusive and recommended more awareness raising programs for making the school environment more inclusive so that they welcome pre-service teachers' initiatives in favour of values of inclusion. In this point, a suggestion can be made for developing collaborative programs between university/institution and schools. During practicum activities, various ranges of assistance were demanded through reducing class size, providing resource support and providing special support for including children with special needs through environmental modification and early intervention programs. Lack of resources could be mentioned as a global phenomenon as such challenge was identified in studies conducted in the US (Harvey et al., 2010), India (Sharma et al., 2009) and Hong Kong (Chong et al., 2007).

There was a general agreement among respondents in respect of their beliefs about the deficiencies in provisions and facilities in schools that undermined the general principles of individualised and learner centred teaching learning, which also would address the need for the concept inclusive education. The main suggested strategy in this regard centred on differentiated and individualised teaching-learning, especially in a large class such as, small-group activities, maximizing use of space in and out of the classroom, introducing team teaching, peer-tutoring, teaching assistantship in the classrooms, and efficient time management. It is noteworthy that none expressed belief in an alternative way of considering large class size as a source of extended resource for classroom activities or scope of practicing more creative teaching-learning and classroom management as suggested by UNESCO (2006)'s toolkit for managing large class size for inclusive education. Research studies (Benbow, Mizrachi, Oliver & Said-Moshiro, 2007; Passigna, 1997) and literature (UNESCO, 2006) on large class size management suggested that such challenge can be well-managed by improving teachers' skills, motivations and providing opportunities to apply their innovations and problem solving skills. One implication of this study clearly is greater attention to large classroom management issues in the existing teacher preparation curriculum of Bangladesh.

Recognising the limitations of the school facilities and provisions and the deficits in respect of teacher deployment, training and preparation, many participants felt the necessity of having "primary care programs" for the children from disadvantaged background before

they are brought to the regular classrooms. These appear to suggest the importance of early intervention programs to identify and assist children currently or prospectively with special needs. Interviewees also believed that pre-service teachers' aptitude, interest and motivation regarding teaching as a profession were a vital factor in successful implementation of inclusive education. They recommended revision of the government's current teacher recruitment policy and practice so that appropriate people who have aptitude for the profession could be attracted to and kept in teaching.

One concern raised by respondents was how pre-existing personal beliefs and values about human nature, teaching-learning, occupations and occupational and professional goals brought by teacher trainees into the program constrained the process and outcome of teacher preparation. Such a concern is justified as revealed in studies by Nespor (1987) and Kagan (1992). These studies affirmed that though teachers gain new knowledge in training programs, they are mostly guided by their pre-existing personal knowledge or beliefs. In order to change such preconceived beliefs the trainee teachers have to be given the opportunity to face new experiences (Pajares, 1992; Richardson, 1996). Institutional heads recognised the difficulties about changing the beliefs of pre-service teachers and suggested careful consideration to revising the pre-service teacher education curriculum and the program to make them more practical oriented and problem-based in order to create opportunities for challenging and critically examining traditional beliefs. As Kagan (1992) noted, if we aim to change teachers' beliefs, first we have to make them aware of their own beliefs and then pose for them challenges through different real-life events.

Some of the participants were strongly supportive of the rights approach to equal educational access. They looked at inclusive education as a rights issue and expressed the belief that despite many challenges, the right to education had to be established in order to ensure education for all children. The rights-based approach supported the broad concept of inclusive education within which special needs education was seen as a sub-set. On the whole, however, the interview responses reveal that the interviewees gave a cautious and conditional support to inclusive education. They believed that implementation of inclusive education called for certain conditions to be met in the existing education system. Analysis of the study findings pointed at necessary policy measures for making the education system of Bangladesh more inclusive.

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