

BANGLADESH

Special Education in Bangladesh: Present Trend and Future Needs

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Introduction:

Education is the fundamental and basic need for every human being. Without education it is almost impossible to develop the quality of human life. For survival, protection and development of human potentialities, education is the only way. The constitution of Bangladesh has clearly spelled in its article 28 (3) that 'No citizen shall, on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth be subjected to any disability, liability, restriction or condition with regard to access to any place of public entertainment or resort, or admission to any educational institution.'

"Education for All (EFA)" is global campaign and most popular slogan which does not exclude the people with disability. Bangladesh is very much aware to implement the slogan in the country for all segments of students. Over the years Bangladesh has achieved a remarkable progress in basic education. Primary education was free and made compulsory under the Primary Education (Compulsory) Act 1990. Bangladesh has undertaken various measures with regard to EFA indicator access and gender equity. As a result, the net primary enrolment rate has increased from 65% in 1997 to 91% in 2007. More remarkably, Bangladesh has already achieved the MDG goal of gender parity in primary and secondary education. But still huge number of children with disabilities has not yet been able to access the educational facilities as desired.

In Bangladesh, there are three alternatives education system regarding the academic provision of children with disabilities named as: Special, Integrated and Inclusive education system. Besides, these education program, home-based education program and distance education program are also practiced here. Special education program are put into practice at primary level and Early Childhood and Care Education (ECCE)

The Ministry of Social Welfare (MOSW) is playing a vital and important role along with the Ministry of Education for providing education to the student with disabilities in accordance with their special needs. The Ministry of Social Welfare has designed and planned some of its educational institution with the need of disability concerned. The Ministry has arranged systematic teaching procedure, provided appropriate educational equipment, materials, accessible settings and other interventions for the student with different types of disabilities.

2. Role of Ministry of Social Welfare providing special education for the student with disabilities

Though the Ministry of Social Welfare believes the new approach of inclusive education is the best form of education for the student with disabilities but the Ministry emphasizes special classes, resource

rooms and other arrangements in regular schools and their position in the education system. At present the Ministry of Social Welfare runs some education programs for the student with disabilities through the Department of Social Services.

2.1 Integrated Education Programme in regular schools for the Visually Impaired

The “Integrated Education Program for the Visually Impaired Children” with a view to provide education with normal students. They are taught in Braille system, which requires Braille books. The books are published in the Braille press of the Employment and Rehabilitation Centre for the Physically Handicapped (ERCPH), Tongi, Gazipur. Started functioning since 1974, the Programme has incorporated the curriculum of the Secondary Education System. Initially, under this program, 47 units have been set up in selected normal secondary schools in 47 districts. The rest 17 districts remaining have been covered gradually and the number of units is now 64. Every year some of the students pass out in the Secondary School Certificate (SSC) Examination and some new students get admission in the schools. The schools are enriched with a resource room with essential educational equipment and materials to address the need of the student with disabilities.

The program helps the visually impaired children to get school education, social education and mobility training. Thus the program aims at the development of the visually impaired students through education and training and make them productive citizens of the country. It has been observed that they are capable to lead self-sustained lives provided they are blessed with essential education and requisite training. The Department of Social Services (DSS) under the Ministry of Social Welfare has signed a MOU with an International NGO named the Sight Savers International to enhanced Integrated Education Program for Visually Impaired Students.

2.2 Special School for the Visually Impaired

The Government has taken steps for educating the visually impaired children in specialized institution. The Government established 4 special schools in 4 divisions in 1962 which are located in Dhaka, Chittagong, Rajshahi and Khulna. In 1965, another school was established for the visually impaired in Barisal. The schools provide education in Braille system. To impart education among the children, who are severely impaired, must be taught by Braille system while the low vision persons need to use magnifying glasses or books with large print. A good number of children have already received primary level education from these schools. Recently the MoSW is considering a project to upgrade the primary school to high school level. The number of students in these schools are 240. In these schools, besides, education, they are getting training on mobility, bamboo and cane works and so on. This helps the inmates eligible for getting jobs suitable for them. In the private sector, there are institutions run by the NGOs where visually impaired children are taught and trained.

2.3 School for the Hearing Impaired

For providing education, training and rehabilitation, the MoSW is running 7 schools for hearing

impaired. Here 270 hearing impaired children are getting free food, lodging, education and training. They are also trained in sign language to express their aspirations, expectations and opinions easily, so that not only the trained personnel but also general people sometimes can guess their sign language. Under this program besides education and training, other psychological and socialization problems of the inmates are duly addressed. This education and training are provided to make the hearing impaired children as potential human resource and are employed in jobs suitable for them.

2.4 Institute for the Mentally Retarded Children

The National Policy on Disability 1995 and Bangladesh Disabled Welfare Act 2001-guarantee the equal rights and dignity of the Persons with disabilities including the mentally retarded persons. The said policy and act ensure their full participation in social and state activities. Accordingly Government has taken initiative for those mentally retarded children who are comparatively less developed according to their age. These exceptional/mentally retarded children need special attention on their orientation e.g. behavior, education and medical treatment. The DSS strongly believes that proper education, training, care and guidance can help the mentally retarded children to live in a family environment.

The MoSW has established an institution for the Mentally Retarded Children in Roufabad, Chittagong. Special education, medicare, training facilities are provided there in accordance with causes and severity of the retardedness. The total capacity of inmates in the institution is 100. Children between 6-12 years are allowed to be admitted into this institution. Food, lodging and training are provided free of cost in this institution.

2.5 National Special Education Centre

This institution has a faculty of Bachelor in Special Education (BSEd). There are separate schools for hearing impaired and mentally handicapped boys and girls, a Teacher's Training College, a library and a resource centre. It may be mentioned that there are separate facilities to provide residential accommodation to 70 hearing impaired and mentally disabled students.

2.6 SWID-Bangladesh

The Government has provided grants money to the "Society for the Welfare of the Intellectually Disabled-Bangladesh"- SWID-Bangladesh under which 44 non-Government Organizations are working in the Intellectual Disability Education Institutions in different districts of the country. About 442 Teachers/Officer/Staffs are getting remuneration from this fund through the Foundation.

2.7 Bangladesh Foundation of Disabled Persons

The non-Government Organization "Bangladesh Foundation of Disabled Persons" is provided 60% salary and other allowances as Government grant money to 57 Teachers/Officers/Staffs of 7 Organizations working in Dhaka and Manikgonj districts.

3. Role of Special Institutions in Inclusive Education.

Bangladesh has the advantage of a highly potential National Centre for Special Education and Special Education Department in the University of Dhaka. Which can be developed into a lead institution to stimulate and support activities to include Children with Disabilities in regular inclusive schools. There are special schools mostly located in urban cities and towns. These institutions and NGOs which have considerable experience in education of Children with Disabilities should be included in the inclusive educative coalition and network.

Early childhood education is important for all children, but for children with disability, it is essential to prepare them with special skills (daily living, communication, mobility language, etc.) to improve their potentiality.

4. Recent Trend of Inclusive Education in Bangladesh with Special Needs

The Constitution of Bangladesh spells in its article 17 that “(a) establishing a uniform, mass oriented and universal system of education and extending free and compulsory education to all children to such stage as may be determined by law. (b) relating education to the needs of society and producing properly trained and motivated citizen to serve those needs. (c) Removing illiteracy within such time as may be determine by law.”

The World Conference on Special Needs Education in Cooperation with UNESCO held in Salamanca, Spain in 1994 reaffirmed the commitment to Education for All “(EFA)” by endorsing the “Framework of Action on Special Needs Education” recognizing the necessity and urgency of providing education for children with special education needs within regular education system. The Government of Bangladesh is a signatory country in the Salamanca declaration though special education needs in the mainstream education or inclusive education recognized later a decade in the country.

The government has formed a committee for Inclusive Education for the first time in 1999 under the Ministry of Education with the representatives of the Ministry of Social Welfare and UNESCO to promote education of children with disability in the regular schools.

The Ministry of Primary and Mass Education (MoPME) is responsible for basic education, comprising formal free and compulsory Primary and literacy and non-formal education. The Ministry of Education (MoEdu) is responsible for secondary and higher education; it also looks after the Madrasah (Islamic) education. More than 700 NGOs are active in non-formal education, with some of them organizing and managing formal primary schools as well. The private sector manages the English medium schools.

The launching of the sector-wide program Primary Education Development Programme (PEDP-II) in 2004 marked a significant scaling up of government’s commitment to EFA goals and for the first time recognized inclusive education policy under this project. Within Directorate of Primary Education (DPE), a Access and Inclusive Education Cell (AIEC) has established in 2005 that is responsible for initiating efforts in social inclusion. An Inclusive Education Framework has been developed which covers Gender, Children with Special Needs, Indigenous Children, and Vulnerable

Groups. Strategies and action plans have been completed. AIEC has developed the action plan for Student with special needs and it has been implemented.

A recent review of inclusive education in Bangladesh (UNICEF, 2007) found that PEDP-II has made important strides forward in terms of social inclusion during its first three years: *“It has brought to DPE and MoPME the language of social inclusion and a heightened awareness and understanding of its importance where it barely existed before..... It has begun to take the first steps on the long road of bringing special needs children into schools. It has built thousands of new primary schools that incorporate ramps for use by children with disabilities. It has begun the task of supporting capacity development across DPE in terms of social inclusion issues and activities, including in monitoring and evaluation.”*

Under the PEDP II, the DPE has issued a circular for the primary school to enroll the students with special needs who have reasonable amounts of disability in the beginning of the 2006. DPE conducted a baseline survey in 2005 and took initiative to identify students with special needs. The baseline report revealed that 45680 children with disabilities need support in primary schools and among them significant number students with intellectual disabilities. DPE has moved to improve identification process of students with special needs. Under this project, government has redesigned the pre-service basic teachers training curriculum that is included inclusive education especially teaching method of special educational needs.

5. Way Forward

The scope and function of special Schools can be redefined. Some steps to be taken for strengthening the programs which include:

- Preparation of moderately disabled children for regular school through early childhood education programs.
- Meeting educational needs of children with several disabilities.
- Provide guidance and support to regular school teachers to meet special needs of Children with Disabilities, education of children with special needs is an issue of curriculum and teachers training.
- Stress should be on improving access of Children with Disabilities to the curriculum of regular school, instead of a separate exclusive curriculum for Children with Disabilities.
- Evaluation system should be introduced.
- Curriculum should meet educational needs of all children including those with special needs all stakeholders teachers of regular and special schools, teacher, trainers, child development specialist and curriculum specialists should be involved in the exercise.
- In-service training programs under different projects should also address the educational needs of special needs education.
- Special teachers training program should include core program for all disabilities to support regular schools and meeting educational needs of children with several disabilities in special schools.

Conclusion

For encouraging inclusive and special education the Government of Bangladesh has introduced stipend for the student with disabilities by the MoSW. Government has signed and ratified UN Convention on the Rights of the Persons with Disabilities. The Government has also ratified Optional Protocol. The Government has appointed 46 focal point of different Ministries and Departments to over see the rights of the PWDs including education. As a result Government has promised bound to create educational facilities for the student with disabilities. Both forms of special and inclusive education could be the excellent solution of education for all including student with disabilities.

<Questions and Answers after Country Report>

Q1. Co-operation between NGO's and Govn't is problem with Malaysian agenda also They do not have enough funds.

A1. NGO's try to do things their own way, but this is a special area. Without government moral support, NGO's cannot go on.

Q2. Who gets the stipend and what accountability

A2. Goes to individual children.

Q3. Government has appointed 46 focal points. How does this work?

A3. Include different ministry and organization – as they have different types of work. Some are responsible for education – others are responsible for other areas – so aviation has to provide access for disability at the airport, etc.

Q4. Ratification of Convention for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Has it had any impact on policies?

A4. There was some conflict between law/policies with the Convention. Therefore, dialogue is going on with stakeholders – to modify existing rules/laws. Then work may take place to meet the Convention.

Q6. Does the National Special Education Centre take the responsibility for the curriculum?

A6. Very new organization – currently not fixed but roles will be further developed.

Using regular curriculum - Braille for the visually impaired, for example

Comments from the Chair

1 Importance of the relationship with NGO's

2 Importance of inter-ministry approach