Inclusive Education Reform in Bangladesh: Pre-Service Teachers' Responses to Include Students with Special Educational Needs in Regular Classrooms

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Inclusive education (IE) has been recognized as a key strategy to ensure education for all in the developing world for the last two decades. As a developing country, Bangladesh is striving to address IE by undergoing various initiatives such as policy reform, awareness creation and teacher development. This paper based on a qualitative approach attempts to explore pre-service teachers' responses to include students with special educational needs (SEN) in regular classrooms in primary schools. A one-on-one interview was conducted with 20 pre-service teachers who were enrolled in a teacher education program of one public university in Bangladesh. The findings revealed from the study indicate that majority of the pre-service teachers have unfavourable attitudes to include students with SEN in regular classrooms. Misconception and lack of knowledge about disabilities are revealed from most of the pre-service teachers' responses. Further large class size, high workloads, inflexible curriculum policy of primary education and inadequate experiential learning facilities of teacher education program are identified as barriers to IE reform. Several issues are discussed as implications in order to promote better inclusive practices in regular primary education.

INTRODUCTION

Internationally in the developed and developing world, education systems are going through major reforms and changes. IE of students with SEN in regular schools is to be one such reform in current education systems. IE refers to all students being valued, accepted and respected regardless of ethnic and cultural backgrounds, socio-economic circumstances, abilities, gender, age, religion, beliefs and behaviours (Forlin, 2004; United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 1994). In this study, IE has been considered as an approach which allows students with SEN to participate academically with their regular peers in regular classrooms. It should be mentioned that students with SEN are also defined in several ways in the contemporary

literature. Therefore, it is important to provide a specific definition of students with SEN for this particular study. The following functional definition clarifies how "SEN" has been conceptualised in this study:

> Students with SEN are those students who have a disability. More specifically, students who have hearing, vision, physical and intellectual impairments are acknowledged as students with SEN.

The principal premise of IE is that schools are about belonging, nurturing and educating all students regardless of their differences in ability (Kozleski, Artiles, Fletcher & Engelbrecht, 2007). IE is defined as a strategy to ensuring "education for all" (Ainscow, Booth & Dyson, 2006, p. 15). In an inclusive school, children are given equitable support so that every child can be able to participate physically, socially and academically with their peers (Pearce, 2009). This means that in an IE setting the environment, curriculum, teaching methods, assessment and reporting need to be adjusted or differentiated. Various terms are used to refer IE in literature such as integration, normalization, mainstreaming, inclusion and least restrictive. However, although these terms often reflect different conceptualizations (Thomazet, 2009; Ainscow, Booth & Dyson, 2006), the success and failure of such educational approach hinge on the knowledge, attitudes and responses that teachers exhibit in classrooms (Ross-Hill, 2009).

The attitudes of teachers influence their behaviour in classrooms (Ajzen, 2005). "Attitude is a psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degrees of favour or disfavour" (Eagle & Chaiken, 1993, p. 1). Attitude is comprised of three components; a cognitive, an affective and a behavioural (Bizer, Barden & Petty, 2003; Eagle & Chaiken, 1993). Literature offers a wide choice of words to describe attitudes such as, values, judgements, opinions, perceptions, dispositions and perspectives (Ajzen, 1991; Ben-Yehuda, Leyser & Last, 2010). Sometimes teachers do not act out what attitudes they espouse (Argyris & Schon, 1978). Some might have positive attitudes towards IE; however, may not demonstrate these attitudes in their behaviours, which may make an inclusive structure difficult to implement.

The behaviours of a teacher in classrooms determine how students will learn. Teachers' knowledge of diverse learning needs influences their feelings and overall behaviours towards students with SEN (Ryan, 2009). Teachers' motivation may also have a relationship with their behaviours. Forlin, Loreman, Sharma and Earle (2009) argue that the success of IE of students with SEN is largely dependent on the regular teachers' willingness to work with them. Therefore, it is necessary to identify whether or not the willingness of teachers is associated with the attitudes they espouse.

The belief system of teachers plays a major role in inclusive teaching practice. Barnyak and Paquette (2010) reported that teachers are unlikely to change their teaching style when a change is warranted, unless their belief system can be changed first. Similar results were found by Rakap and Kaczmarek (2010) while they measured a number (n-190) of regular teachers' attitudes towards inclusivity in Turkey. They reported that

teachers' willingness to teach students with SEN in regular classrooms depended largely on their attitudes and experience. Many education researchers, who explored elementary or secondary teachers' attitudes, often argue that the belief system of teachers is developed through their teacher education program that they undergo at the university (e.g., see Gao & Mager, 2011). It is also evident that the rate of return of investing in pre-service teachers is much better than that of in-service teachers (Savolainen, Engelbrecht, Nel & Marlinen, 2012). Therefore, to encourage change in teachers' attitudes towards students with SEN in regular classrooms; it is important to understand how pre-service teachers think about IE during their preparation as teachers.

Pre-service teachers could be important agents for implementing IE. With the advent of increasing inclusion of students with SEN in regular classrooms, it has become essential to create 'pathways' for pre-service teachers (Lancaster & Bain, 2010, p. 117) to enhance teaching skills for more diverse groups of students. Many researchers have demonstrated that participation in a pre-service program positively influences the attitudes, self-efficacy and professional efficacy of pre-service teachers to work with students SEN (Burton & Pac, 2009; Novak, Murray, Scheuermann & Curran, 2009; Susan, 2009; Lambe, 2007). However, it is also evident that teacher education institutes sometimes fail to motivate pre-service teachers towards IE due to inappropriately designed preparation programs. For example, Li, Oneonta and Ji (2010) found that although pre-service teachers in some parts of the United States and China had favourable attitudes towards inclusion, they were inadequately prepared to teach students with SEN. They suggested that teacher education institutions in both countries should consider the issues of attitudes and self-efficacy carefully so that pre-service teachers could be better prepared to meet the challenges to IE (Li, Oneonta & Ji, 2010). Therefore, since teachers' attitudes influence practice (Sindelar, Brownell & Billingsley, 2010), it is imperative to understand the responses and expectations of pre-service teachers about IE for students with SEN.

Context of the Study

"Inclusive education is in an embryonic stage in Bangladesh" (Malak & Khanam, 2011, p. 148). Most children with SEN in Bangladesh are segregated from regular schools (Akter & Malak, 2008). Teachers are not skilled to facilitate learners with hearing and visual impairments due to their dissimilar academic backgrounds (Huq, 2008). Although they may have sound intelligence, students with hearing and visual impairments are not included in the regular school because of superstitions and misconceptions of teachers and school administrators in Bangladesh (Kibria, 2005). Malak, Ahsan and Jahan-Ara (2005) showed that about 90% of parents of children with hearing impairment studying in special schools demanded inclusive setting for the academic placement of their children (p.172). However, due to lack of learner-friendly classrooms many students with SEN are denied of their education in primary schools in Bangladesh (Das, 2011).

Education of children with SEN is much more vulnerable in comparison to other learners of the same age groups. 10% of people in Bangladesh have some sorts of special needs (Ahsan & Burnip, 2007, p.64). Only 11% of children with SEN receive

education (Centre for Services and Information in Disabilities [CSID], 2003, p.5). Another research indicates that the dropout rate of students with SEN is very high in Bangladesh due to the unfavourable attitudes of teachers (CSID, 2005).

The Government of Bangladesh is committed to ensure education for all by 2018 (Kabir, 2008). Bangladesh is one of the signatory countries of the Salamanca Declaration-1994, Dakar Framework for Action-2000, and United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities-2006 in which education of children with SEN is to be implemented through an IE approach (Kabir, 2008). The constitution of Bangladesh (Article 28.3 of part III) strongly protects the human rights on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, and place of birth or disability (Ministry of Law, Justice & Parliamentary Affairs, 2000). In Article 17 (a, b and c) the constitution also guarantees education for all without any discrimination (Ministry of Law, Justice & Parliamentary Affairs, 2000). The Bangladesh Persons with Disabilities Welfare Act, 2001, emphasizes education of children with SEN through IE (Ahsan & Burnip, 2007).

Furthermore, the most recent education policy, known as the National Education Policy-2010, indicates the need for inclusion of children with SEN as a strategy of reducing dropout rates in primary education (Ministry of Education [MoE], 2010). Taking IE agenda into consideration, since 2003 the Directorate of Primary Education (DPE) has been running several projects, including Primary Education Development Program (PEDP)-2 (Ahuja & Ibrahim, 2006). Teachers' professional development (PD) has been prioritized for introducing IE in PEDP-2; however, there is still a lot of works to be done as the knowledge, attitude and skills of teachers are significantly unfavourable for students with SEN (Ahsan, Sharma & Deppeler, 2011; Ahuja & Ibrahim, 2006; Malak & Khanam, 2010). Since there has been little research undertaken on pre-service and in-service teachers' attitudes and beliefs about IE in Bangladesh, the present study was vital to fill the gap in knowledge regarding IE through the lens of pre-service teachers.

Scope of Pre-Service and In-Service Teachers' PD in Bangladesh

The scope of pre-service and in-service teachers' professional development on IE is limited in the existing public teachers' training institute in Bangladesh. At present, the following institutions are providing training to pre-service and in-service teachers in the primary education sector:

National Centre of Special Education (NCSE)

NCSE is the only government run training centre for preparing special education teachers. This centre offers diploma courses for primary school teachers and pre-service teachers in special education. The duration of this course is 10 months. However, the curriculum of this course is mainly based on special education rather than IE for students with SEN.

Primary Training Institute (PTI)

There are around 53 government run PTIs in Bangladesh. PTIs are the largest training institutes for primary teachers. Every novice teacher provisionally must complete foundation training from PTIs. It should be clarified that most of the novice teachers in

primary education in Bangladesh commence teaching without any prior training. For instance, a fresh graduate in any subject and without any Bachelor or Certificate course in education can apply for a teaching position in primary school. As such, novice teachers who participate in foundation training in PTIs are recognised as pre-service teachers. However, the entire training program of PIT contains only one chapter focused upon disability. Thus, although PTIs have potential to prepare novice teachers for inclusive practices, due to the traditional nature of the curriculum, teachers are being deprived of achieving required skills. Recently, the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education (MoPME) has taken initiatives to revise the curriculum for incorporating IE related courses.

Directorate of Primary Education (DPE)

The Directorate of Primary Education (DPE) works on behalf of the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education for primary education sector. The Inclusive Cell of DPE prepares IE training manuals for Upazilla (subdistrict) Education Officers (UEOs). The UEOs then transfer the training to the head teachers and general teachers at the subdistrict level. Only some basic issues about disability have been included in these training manuals which are less supportive for developing teachers' pedagogical skills for IE classrooms.

Cluster Training Program

Cluster training is one of the innovations of primary education in Bangladesh. Teachers receive a daylong training session once a month in a cluster. A cluster contains around ten schools of a subdistrict. Usually education officers at the subdistrict level conduct the cluster training in which teachers are given opportunities to share their experiences and receive feedback on their queries from the education officers. The concept of IE is being integrated in the cluster-training program gradually.

Teacher Education Institute at University Level

The Institute of Education and Research (IER) of the University of Dhaka and Dhaka Teacher Training College under National University provide teacher education programs in both Bachelor (4-year) and Masters (1-year) levels. Graduates qualified as pre-service teachers from these institutes not only teach in primary and secondary schools but also contribute to the national level as educational consultants.

Initiatives of Non-government Organizations (NGOs) for Teacher Training

NGOs are playing a major role in creating awareness on people with disabilities in Bangladesh. However, their role in preparing teachers for inclusive practice seems to be passive because the concentration of most of the NGOs is on disability rights perspective. The following NGOs provide awareness training to primary education teachers:

Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC)

As the largest NGO in the world, BRAC operates over 32,000 primary schools (Mahbub, 2008 p.33). Due to its innovative efforts, BRAC's schools are regarded as committed to inclusion (Ahuja & Ibrahim, 2006) and currently 28,144 children with special needs are enrolled at BRAC schools (Mahbub, 2008, p.34). However, the

philosophy, one teacher for one school, of BRAC sometimes seems to be very challenging to address inclusive practices.

Centre for Rehabilitation of the Paralysed (CRP)

CRP is popular in Bangladesh for its wonderful reputation in the field of special education (Ahuja & Ibrahim, 2006). This organization has a model inclusive school through which awareness training in IE for the primary school teachers and primary education officers is conducted.

Centre for Disability in Development (CDD)

CDD in collaboration with DPE trains primary education teachers for inclusive education. This organization also provides training to special schools.

Teacher Development Institute (TDR)

TDR offers diploma and certificate courses in IE for primary and secondary education teachers and professionals. The curriculums of TDR cover both basic knowledge of disability and pedagogical skills required for IE classrooms.

Research Questions

Based on the context of Bangladeshi pre-service teachers, the study investigated the following research questions:

1. What are the attitudes of pre-service teachers towards IE for students with SEN in regular primary schools?
2. What are the expectations of pre-service teachers to include students with SEN in regular primary classrooms?

METHOD

Participants of this study were the pre-service teachers enrolled in a teacher education program of one teacher education institute in Bangladesh. 20 pre-service teachers studying Bachelor of Education (Honours) were chosen purposively for this study. Following steps were taken in to consideration in order to select the pre-service teachers:

1. Upon permission of the director of the teacher education institute, a small meeting was arranged with the students (pre-service teachers). Students participated in the meeting were verbally briefed about the aims and objectives of this research. Further, they were provided with an explanatory statement about the study. The students willing to volunteer in this study were requested to write their email in the specific section of the explanatory statement and drop it in to the drop-box after the meeting. This is important to note that students who studied Special Education as major were not invited to participate in this meeting because the aim was to explore general pre-service teachers' responses.
2. 50 students were emailed and requested to respond in one week time if they would like to be interviewed.

3. 32 students expressed their interest to volunteer in this study. First 22 students were formally invited via email to sign a consent form. 2 students could not manage time, thereby 20 students were finally considered as participants for this study.   12 participants out of 20 were female. 13 and 5 participants had experience of practicum and simulation respectively while   2 participants studied in their 2nd year.

A one-on-one in-depth interview approach was used to conduct this qualitative study. A consent form describing the anonymity of the interview was signed by the participants individually before they took part in interview. Participants' choices for interview venue were prioritised. It is to be noted that all participants chose the University Canteen as a suitable venue for interview which was conducted in participants' native language, Bangla. Interviews were audio taped with the permission of the participants. The duration of an interview was 39 minutes in average.

An unstructured approached was used in all steps of conducting interviews. IE is a newer concept in Bangladesh (Malak & Khanam, 2011) and it was unsure whether the participants had knowledge about this particular concept. The aim was not to frame the participants within any specific aspect of inclusion. Rather it was striven to let the participants express what they felt about inclusion. As such, there were no predetermined questions for interview. Most of the interviews began with simply asking if the participant was familiar with IE. Probing questions were mostly useful for conducting all the interviews and guiding the participants to open-up in their responses.

The interviews were transcribed in Bangla and then translated into English. Back translation process was used to ensure the reflection of the contextual meaning in the translated version of the transcriptions. English version transcriptions were used in analysis. Thematic analysis technique was used to interpret the interview data.

RESULTS

Reviewing the transcriptions, data were clustered according to themes with similar groups. Several categories were identified from the open coding process. Various techniques were used to cluster different statements such as underlining, highlighting etc. Groups were developed from the similar kind of statements. A number of similar groups contributed to develop each category as a separate theme. Seven themes have been identified and analysed.

Knowledge and Attitudes about Students with SEN

There was lack of awareness in many participants of the needs of the students with SEN. Attitudinal barriers were seen at all levels of the participants. Several participants had misconceptions and superstitions about disabilities. It seems that the misconceptions of the participants led them to worry about students with SEN. A participant's lack knowledge was articulated as follows:

> Disabled kids are aggressive. They might hit normal students. They are restless and never sit in one place… [They] are unmanageable in the classroom. If you are teaching 100 students in a class and some of them are continuously distracting the whole environment what should you do? (PT-02)

Another participant who was doing her practicum had empathy for students with SEN. However, she still thought that it would be a matter for charitable organization for educating children with SEN. Further, the same participant believed that special schools should be suitable for educating those students. Her reason for that was expressed as-

> I've got 95 students in my class. I am fully engaged with my normal kids. I've been struggling to manage time for the two hearing-impaired students who are dull... Disabled kids would be disadvantaged here because this school hasn't got extra support service for them. I believe special schools are more equipped with support for managing disabled students. ... [I] would like to request the parents to look for a suitable special school for their disabled kids. (PT-05)

One participant who had a sibling with vision impairment was very positive about IE. She believes that teachers have a significant role to play in their behaviour towards students with SEN. Her feeling regarding IE was expressed in the following way-

> I don't think they (SEN) should be enrolled in special school. This is about the attitudes and responsibility of a teacher who can make inclusive education happen in the classroom. ... definitely they can perform with general students in the same class, but they need a little additional supports! (Sad)" (PT-07)

This participant was wondering about the availability of the support services an inclusive school needed.

Further, many participants had misconception about disability while some of them had unfavourable attitudes. A number of participants appeared to have lack of knowledge about students with SEN. "They are ever unhappy...", "they can bite off..." and "they are the strange kids" were the terms used by some of the participants while describing the characteristics of students with SEN.

Support Service for Students with SEN in Regular Classrooms

Most of the participants (n-15) strongly believed that one teacher in a classroom was not adequate for creating an IE environment for students with SEN. Their opinions were mostly related to various kinds of supports they believed to be essential for an IE classroom. Most of the participants (n-12) described 'support service' for IE as 'a teacher who is specialised in Special Education in her/his pre-service training', some of them (n-6) considered 'a teacher who is trained in disability through in-service professional development programs' and a few of them (n-2) mentioned 'a teacher aide having teaching experience in a special school'. By mentioning the current scenario of the primary and secondary education in Bangladesh, one participant expressed his deep concerns about the probability of getting extra resources for children with SEN. His expression is as follows:

> We need a support teacher who knows Braille. ... paraprofessional and teacher aides are necessary if you want to educate disabled kids in my class. I think it is necessary to have a screening centre around the school. Disabled kids should be assessed properly before coming to the regular schools. (PT-03)

The participants disclosed that regular schools were facing tremendous trouble in relation to teacher shortages. They also expressed their higher level of concerns about the recruitment of teacher aides or special teachers for children with SEN. For them it could be one of the 'unachievable desires' to have teacher aides.

Fifteen out of twenty participants thought that the teaching materials used in classrooms were backdated and inadequate. One participant said,

> In my practicum I've been told by my supervisor to observe some classes conducted by the regular teachers. I was surprised to see that teachers are too reluctant to use any teaching materials whereas when I was performing simulation classes at the university I came to know that using teaching material is a must. (PT-20)

Another participant having a similar kind of experience said, "When I asked the teachers why she didn't use teaching material, she replied that the school didn't get any materials from the authority." All the participants in this study believed that students with SEN should require some specially designed teaching materials for making lessons comprehensible for them. However, many participants thought that since regular students were hard to get this facility, it would be more difficult arranging suitable teaching materials for students with SEN.

Curriculum Rigidity

Curriculum was emerged as a repeated concern for many of the participants. The primary education curriculum is centralized. The Government is striving to introduce IE in primary education; however, the textbooks, according to most of the participants, are not easily accessible even for the general students. Several participants were upset with the examination-based education system for the young children. One participant expressed her frustration in the following way:

> …kids are bound to sit for formal exams three times in 12 months…question papers come from the education board. School teachers don't have opportunity to contribute to prepare tests for their students. They are just advised to do what comes from the authority... (PT-01)

Another participant said,

> I've seen a science question paper for Grade V in which a blind student studied. Question no. 1 was about drawing a figure of a tree and describing different parts of it. This question was mandatory for everyone. The blind student was asking me how he could answer that question and I was asking the school principal if he could give any option... (PT-19)

According to the participants who performed their practicum, it seems that primary education assessment system is too much inflexible and designed for measuring academic achievements for the regular students only. The participants also confirmed that although they heard of functional assessment technique for students with SEN at the University, there was no provision of such technique in practice in primary education.

Another participant expressed his frustration in relation to assume that the performances of SEN students would not satisfy the requirement of the mainstream assessment procedure. He said,

> Disabled kids will fail in the exam because everything should be perfect...it is exam, so we can't show them mercy...and we have to take care of the other hundreds of normal students' progress. Where is time to give them (SEN) supports...? (PT-04)

Workloads

Almost all the participants who performed school practicum showed their disappointments in teaching children with SEN in regular classroom due to high workloads. Most of the participants informed that the student-teacher ratio was about 90:1 in most classrooms. Two participants stated,

> There were only five teachers for 470 students in the school where I did my practicum. … I extremely faced teacher shortage even for the normal kids in that school. (PT-10)

> Thank God! I didn't have any disabled student in my classes. Even though I had to conduct more than four classes a day due to staff gap, I was lucky for not having any disabled kids. (PT-17)

However, a participant who had close contact with a student with SEN prior to practicum had a different story. She taught a student with vision impairment in her practicum. She applied various techniques through which she did not feel much pressure with regards to workloads. She told,

> At the first day, I brought the blind student in the front bench and told the first boy to sit beside. ... the student used a Braille Board and was swift in taking notes. Whenever I taught any difficult topic the first boy sitting beside him used to support the student so that he could better understand. (PT-07)

Another participant who was doing her practicum expressed that more and more teachers should be appointed in the mainstream schools for resolving the crisis occurred due to teacher shortage. She added that for doing all these classes, some in a rush, her energy and patience for accommodating children with SEN was improbable. Two participants who studied in their 2nd Year and had not any practicum related experience, recommended that special teachers are needed for taking care of students with SEN because they assumed that regular teachers might not have time for them. One of those two participants' opinions is as follows:

> I think disabled kids also have rights to go to regular schools. I don't think regular teachers have much energy and time to teach them. They should have a separate unit there and a special teacher will look after their education. ... [I am] not sure whether they can follow the same book... I think a special teacher knows better. (PT-14)

Other two participants who had just finished their simulation classes and were preparing for practicum stated that they would have to do a lot of works (such as lesson

planning, making teaching aids) for conducting a class for regular students. They did not expect any students with SEN in their classes because they thought that they would be overloaded. Since they wanted to get a good grade in their practicum semesters, the entire participants (n-5) doing simulation did not wish to take extra workloads.

Peer Acceptance

Peer acceptance was another concern identified from many of the participants. They thought that general students would not accept their special needs peers cordially in the same classrooms. One participant who did not have any experience of inclusive classroom articulated her concern in the following way:

> …If I pay extra attention to them (SEN), other regular students will make noise….some students might laugh at them (SEN) because of their inability to understand lesson… the whole class will be unmanageable. (PT-09)

Further, several participants predicted that the students with SEN might be teased by the general students repetitively, which might make them (SEN) isolated. However, another participant shared his experience regarding peer acceptance by putting himself as an example.

> I was upset at the first day of my university when a blind student sat beside me… .Most of our friends avoided him but I had curiosity….once I noticed that he could take notes faster than me by using a small special board (Braille). He obtained 3rd highest marks in the first in course exam! My misconception was broken. Now he is a very good friend of mine. (PT-08)

A further comment was made by a participant whose argument was mainly about required teaching skill. She said,

> Being a teacher this is my responsibility to learn those skills essential for inclusion. I must know how to provide counselling to the regular students so that they can make friendship with their SEN peers…(PT-06)

Another participant informed that he formed a volunteer group consisting of ten students in a class, where a student with hearing impairment studied. The members of that group helped the particular student in turn doing home work and classroom activities. He said, "I am so happy that the students who used to tease him before are now very good friends of him".

Ignorance and misconception were the primary reasons for participants who presumed that the regular students might not accept students with SEN as their peers. Several participants who were doing their practicum had dissatisfactions regarding peer acceptance. Many participants with practicum experience described that students with SEN did not come to schools regularly and in the classroom they tended to be isolated.

Efficacy and Professional Development

The majority of the participants realised that they were not fully ready to address inclusivity in regular classrooms. They acknowledged the essence of further professional development on IE if they are told to accommodate students with SEN in regular schools. Participants who did not yet perform their practicum seemed to be

worried about the recent changes in primary education policy (Introducing IE). One of them expressed his worries in the following way:

> "I am wondering, I would be able to teach them (SEN) in the same class. I must need a specially trained support teacher…I also need to learn how to handle them practically... I've been taught in an unit about their needs but I actually don't know how to meet those needs in the classroom" (PT-2)

Considering the worries of the participant, it is necessary to work in pre-service teacher preparation programs so that the issue of inclusion can be designed adequately. Describing the experience of practicum, a pre-service teacher shared her disappointment about the lack of experiential learning of the teacher education program she studied in. She described,

> I saw a blind student for the first time in this school. In my entire three years of study I've been told several times that I would be able to make some visits to some special and inclusive schools with a group of students guided by supervisors but ... .This is so unfortunate that I got only one unit in this program that talked about inclusive education.   (PT-11)

Another participant informed that she got chance to visit only one special school in her three years of study in this program. Many participants who had simulation and practicum experiences expressed that they got only one or two simulation sessions regarding IE classroom. They strongly suggested that more courses about inclusive education and more opportunities of hands on experience should be incorporated in the current teacher education program.

Collaboration and School Managing Committee (SMC)

Almost all the participants described that School Managing Committee (SMC) is a vital body in the decision-making process. SMC is known as a local governing body of the school. It is a type of parents' association. All parents of a school elect five members as their representatives in the SMC. Most of the participants strongly agreed that the lack of awareness in SMC members was also a barrier to IE. A participant expressed her sad experience in the following way-

> I taught a boy in Grade-II. He was very sharp. Unfortunately, he lost his hearing ability due to typhoid. Surprisingly, few months later he had been forced to leave the school by the SMC. (PT-06)

Since SMC is formed by incorporating the mainstream parents who might have superstitions about disability, some of the participants suspected that it might work against children with SEN. Therefore, they think that without having encouraging members in the SMC, IE for a student with SEN is not an easy task in Bangladesh.

From the expression of several participants, it can be assumed that there is a gap among teachers, parents and policy makers regarding the issue of disability and IE. Many participants believed that collaboration among the stakeholders was desperately needed for making inclusion possible in regular schools. One participant said,

> ...people at the top (policy makers) think about inclusive education very differently from teachers. They just put an order but don't know how difficult it

           is. Teachers are meaningless because they are never welcome for opinion. If continues, things could go wrong… (PT-16)

It seems like teachers' opinions are not valued in the decision making process. In other word they are neglected and forced to carry out whatever suggested by the authority. Therefore, 'working together' could be one of the effective strategies for implementing IE in regular classrooms.

DISCUSSION

The main purpose of this study was to explore the expectations of pre-service teachers to include students with SEN in regular primary education. From the interview with 20 pre-service teachers in one teacher education institute, this study suggests that there are misconceptions and lack of knowledge of pre-service teachers about students with SEN. Most of the pre-service teachers generalised students with SEN as 'dull', 'unhappy' and 'strange' which are the examples of lack knowledge of the characteristics of various types of students with SEN. Further, majority of the pre-service teachers appeared to think that general students will be deprived of their learning if IE is implemented in regular classrooms. Although a few of pre-service teachers had positive attitudes, majority of them were unfavourable to include students with SEN in regular classrooms. The reasons for recommending special schools for students with SEN mentioned by the pre-service teachers are large class size, high workloads and lack of support services in regular schools. The confidence of the pre-service teachers to teach students with SEN in IE settings appeared through their responses was poor. Moreover, several issues of the teacher education program have been identified as challenges to prepare pre-service teachers for promoting better inclusive practices.

A number of studies investigating pre-service teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education have been supportive of the findings of this study. For instance, findings revealed from the study of Gill, Sherman and Sherman (2009) indicate that pre-service teachers became progressively more negative towards including students with SEN in regular classrooms. Recent study shows that although pre-service teachers were positive towards inclusion of socially disadvantaged students, their attitudes towards including students with SEN in regular classrooms were negative (Gao & Mager, 2011). Research also suggests that there were misconception regarding disability in pre-service teachers who appeared to be reluctant in including students with SEN in regular classrooms (e.g., see Golmic & Hansen, 2012; Savolainen et al., 2012).

In contrast, there are adequate numbers of research which confirm that pre-service teachers develop favourable attitudes towards teaching students with SEN in regular classrooms (e.g., see Novak, Murray, Scheuermann & Curran, 2009; Forlin, Loreman, Sharma & Earle, 2009; Rakab & Kaczmarek, 2010; Rice, 2009). It is also evident that teacher education program can develop positive attitudes of pre-service teachers even though the context is fairly new for IE initiatives. For instance, although IE was relatively new in China, pre-service teachers were reported to have very positive attitudes about including students with SEN in their regular classrooms (Li, Oneonta & Ji, 2010).

Most importantly while school practicum has been recognised as an influential component of pre-service training program for the development of inclusive teaching skills by many researchers (e.g., Pearce, 2009; Golder, Jones & Quinn, 2009), several pre-service teachers in the present study expressed their dissatisfaction regarding the design of practicum. Bortoli, Brown and Hsien (2009) found that pre-service teachers' confidence improved through the increased exposure to teaching students with SEN in practicum. To encourage changes in the attitudes of prospective teachers, it is necessary to design school practicum in such ways that enable pre-service teachers to receive hands on experiences effectively in teaching students with SEN (Novak et al., 2009).

Agreeing with the Salamanca Declaration 1994, the Government of Bangladesh (GOB) has been giving attention to address IE in the regular primary education sector. Considering the importance of contextual nature of IE (Rose, Kaikkonen & Koiv, 2007), the Directorate Primary Education (DPE) has taken several policy initiatives suitable for meeting the challenges concealed in the context of Bangladesh. Teacher training has appeared as one of the top most priorities for promoting IE in regular classrooms for the last five years (Das, 2011). The strategy elaborated in the National Education Policy, 2010 to address better IE practices is to prepare mainstream teachers so that everyone teaching in primary schools can facilitate learner-friendly IE environment for students with SEN (MoE, 2010). Although it is evident that collaboration in teaching especially, 'co-teaching' plays a significant role in the Bangladeshi regular classrooms for addressing IE (Ahsan, 2009; Malak & Khanam, 2011: 2010), due to the shortage of special teachers this strategy has not been considered as a provision. Rather it is believed that all the prospective teachers are gaining adequate skills for IE and they will be able to disseminate their knowledge and skills to the in-service teachers who have been also providing with IE training through PEDP-2. According to the commitment, the GOB is to achieve Millennium Development Goals (MDG) through ensuring education for all by 2018 (Islam, 2010). Therefore, it is clear that the DPE and recent education policy underpin pre-service teachers to be the significant ones for the successful implementation of IE in the regular primary schools.

However, the scenario of pre-service teachers in terms of their knowledge, attitudes and expectations contradicts with the strategy taken by the GOB. While the policy suggests that every regular teacher should be skilled in IE, the pre-service teachers think that this is the responsibility of the special teachers to teach students with SEN. Despite their special requirements in learning, based on the Compulsory Primary Education Act, 1991 and Bangladesh Persons with Disability Welfare Act, 2001, students with SEN cannot be segregated from the mainstream education (Ahsan & Burnip, 2007; Malak & Khanam, 2011). However, majority of the pre-service teachers believed that special school should be better for students with SEN. The reasons for this type of responses could be explained in several directions.

First, there might be a gap between the policy of the GOB and the curriculum of the teacher education institute. This institute has a Special Education (SpEd) program from which 15 pre-service teachers finish their graduation every year. These students are known as special education teachers. Since the pre-service teachers interviewed were

not from the SpEd program, they might not feel themselves teaching students with SEN. However, the reality is different because the GOB does not have any provision of recruiting special teacher in regular schools. All pre-service teachers are treated the same during the recruitment process. In Bangladesh, IE schools are not separately identified, nor are any teachers specially recruited for teaching students with SEN in regular classrooms. Rather all the regular primary schools in a district have been declared accessible for students with SEN. Therefore, the responsibility of teaching students with SEN goes upon every regular teacher of primary schools. Unfortunately, the teacher education program might have failed to aware the pre-service teachers of this strategy.

Second, this could be one of the challenges of the teacher education institute which was unable to provide the appropriate knowledge of IE to them. There is only one unit in the teacher education program focused upon IE. Therefore, the scope of gaining theoretical knowledge about IE for the students with SEN is very limited for the pre-service teachers other than studying SpEd program. Recent research shows that several principals of a number of teacher training institutes in Bangladesh acknowledged the limitation of their curriculum regarding IE (Ahsan, Sharma & Deppeler, 2011). Particularly, this teacher education institute has been providing special teachers to special schools through its SpEd program. As a result, the curriculums of the mainstream Bachelor of Education and Master of Education programs might not have incorporated the recent changes in education policy regarding IE. However, contemporary literature on IE highly underpins the need of revision of traditional pre-service teacher training programs to make IE happen in regular classrooms. For instance, in an extensive literature review Alquraini and Gut (2012) have encouraged teacher education institutes to consider revising their pre-service training curriculum in order to address the importance of IE and effective methods to create IE for students with SEN.

Finally, limited opportunity for micro-teaching regarding IE could be a reason which might not have allowed the pre-service teachers to build their confidence in teaching students with SEN. Micro-teaching, familiar with simulation in Bangladesh, plays a significant role in preparing pre-service teachers (Kilic, 2010; Tina, 2006) to gain necessary prior skills for teaching in real classroom situations. Without emphasizing teachers' relevant professional development, a suitable IE environment cannot be expected (Bain & Lancaster, 2006). Therefore, a regular teacher without having any pedagogical knowledge of IE is unable to create the required teaching-learning environment for students with SEN (Kibria, 2005). The pre-service teachers are not getting adequate supports from their teacher education program to obtain relevant pedagogical knowledge and skills which might hinder them to think positively about IE for students with SEN.

There are a number of challenges of the education policy to address inclusivity in regular classrooms in Bangladesh. While the policy suggests every primary school to provide IE, the curriculum of this level remains inflexible and inaccessible for students with SEN. Specially, considering the frequency and types of examination, it seems that

the purpose of teaching in primary education is only for testing the achievements of children. Curriculum adaptation is recognised as a key step for making IE possible in regular schools (Evans & Lunt, 2002) where students' academic achievement is assessed functionally based on their potential. Unfortunately, lack of flexible curriculum does not allow teachers to use this sort assessment procedure in Bangladeshi classrooms. Research conducted in Mexico revealed that inflexible curriculum impeded Mexican pre-service teachers to develop positive attitudes towards IE for students with SEN (Forlin, Cedillo, Romero-Contreras, Fletcher & Hernandez, 2010). Like many other South Asian countries, the tendency of 'teaching for testing' (Ding, Li, Li, & Kulm, 2008) hinders the development of confidence of pre-service and in-service teachers in Bangladesh in teaching students with SEN.

Additional supports for students with SEN in terms of extra time and attention, suitable teaching materials, and access to appropriate resources and services are known as the key elements to IE success in regular schools (Westwood & Graham, 2003). However, the findings of this study indicate that the pre-service teachers feel themselves overloaded due to lack of access to additional support. Although the class size is extremely large in primary education, findings revealed from this study clearly point out that the probability of getting a teacher aide in such classroom is unachievable.

The adequate sensitization among the stakeholders regarding students with SEN is essential prior to introduce IE. Unfortunately, according to the pre-service teachers, it seems that SMC has not been sensitized about IE. SMC is recognised as one of the local education authorities to which primary school teachers are accountable (MoPME, 2010). Each primary school has a SMC in which parent representatives plays an important role in the decision making process regarding the school. Due to the negative attitudes of the SMC members, IE initiatives may face numerous challenges because SMC may help regular teachers develop unfavourable attitudes towards students with SEN.

CONCLUSION

IE is not just an event rather it could be a continuous process of development. The quality of teachers determines how IE process will progress (OECD, 2005). One of the best ways of developing teachers' quality is giving the effectively designed intervention to the pre-service teachers during their teacher education program (Tina, 2006). The prospective teachers could be recognised as an important agent in Bangladesh for addressing IE because they are expected to be enriched with IE knowledge and skills. However, due to lack of effective teacher education program at the university and inflexible curriculum policy of primary education, the success of introducing inclusivity in regular classrooms is improbable. While experiential learning appeared to have a great influence on the pre-service teachers to shift their attitudes and expectations towards students with SEN, the teacher education institute is yet to design its program to provide this opportunity. As a result, pre-service teachers get frustrated which could impact on their entire professional career. It is imperative to understand that teachers with stress cannot teach well. Thus, in order to minimise stress in pre-service teachers regarding IE, there is no alternative of the teacher education institute to revise its

curriculum based on the needs of recent changes of the education policy and the desire of the pre-service teachers about experiential learning support. A further in-depth investigation could explore the strengths and deficiencies of the teacher education program in consideration with the IE strategies taken in the National Education Policy 2010.

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