

# Inclusive Education in Bangladesh: Policy and Practice

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## Abstract

Bangladesh is a signatory country of major international declarations of inclusive education (IE). Over the past two decades, it has enacted policies and legislation in favour of IE. Contemporary literature suggests that having legitimised guidelines does not always ensure practices that are aligned with the principles of IE. This paper aims to analyse how the policies and legislation reflect the notion of IE in the context of Bangladesh. Moreover, to understand the practice of IE, it also looks at two major projects, Primary Education Development Program (PEDP) and Teaching Quality Improvement in Secondary Education Project (TQI-SEP), being implemented in the country over last 7 years. The study was mainly supported by literature, and policy documents and guidelines. A systematic review approach was used to understand the notion of IE and its specific implementation pattern. Results suggest that IE policies in Bangladesh are predominantly borrowed from several international treaties and they seem to be little understood among practitioners and classroom teachers within the context of Bangladesh. Further, the result also shows that teachers' attitudes towards IE and limited professional development are major barriers to implementing IE at school level. The findings imply that the policy guidelines in relation to the context of IE in Bangladesh tend to be low-leverage tools. Further research is needed to understand IE practice at classroom level.

## Introduction

The ultimate philosophy to embrace all learners with equitable access and participation in school is recognized as inclusive education (IE). The goal of IE has been established to act as a catalyst to ensure access, presence, participation and achievement of all students including those from diverse backgrounds (UNESCO, 1994). IE does not stand only for including a group of marginalized students in regular classrooms; rather the broader philosophy is to embrace all students in a uniform education system (Ainscow, 2005).

During the past two decades significant attention has been paid to explore different approaches to education around the world to ensure that diversity is addressed effectively in ordinary classrooms. Since our schools are increasingly expected to be more diverse, meeting the demands of students with diverse learning needs is obligatory. This requires teachers to make a total shift in their pedagogical thoughts from teacher-controlled ideology to student-centered approaches. It is, however, a challenge for schools to ensure that every student is academically engaged in classrooms.

The pioneer IE researchers consistently argue that the process of an inclusive approach involves a lot of challenges. For example, Ainscow (2005) described the development of inclusive practices as a complex phenomenon because of having several factors involved with this process. He argued that the absence of a common language within the stakeholders, including policy makers, teachers and community could impede the development of inclusive school culture. This amplifies the complexity of the development of inclusive school culture.

Practice of IE is informed by its policy that includes relevant guidelines, principles and procedures. Much of the research in the field of inclusion has suggested that despite having a noble policy, the goals of IE could remain unachieved if the policy fails to inform the practices (e.g., see Ainscow & Miles, 2009; Bourke, 2010; Slee, 2006). This argument can be appropriately applied to the context in which the education providers or the policy makers (e.g., in developing countries) tend to impose borrowed ideas about IE policy from another context (e.g., developed countries). IE is highly context oriented (Ainscow, Booth & Dyson, 2006; Armstrong, 2000) and teachers have consistently been considered as an important agent of addressing inclusivity in classrooms (e.g., see Smith & Leonard, 2005). It is important to ensure that a policy embraces the temporal impact of contextual aspects and

underpins the factors a school could encounter. Policies which are reluctant in reflecting the thoughts of school practitioners may construct an IE structure even more difficult to implement. This chapter, therefore, examines the existing IE policies in the context of Bangladesh, discusses the implications as well as raises some issues that will require further investigation and analysis.

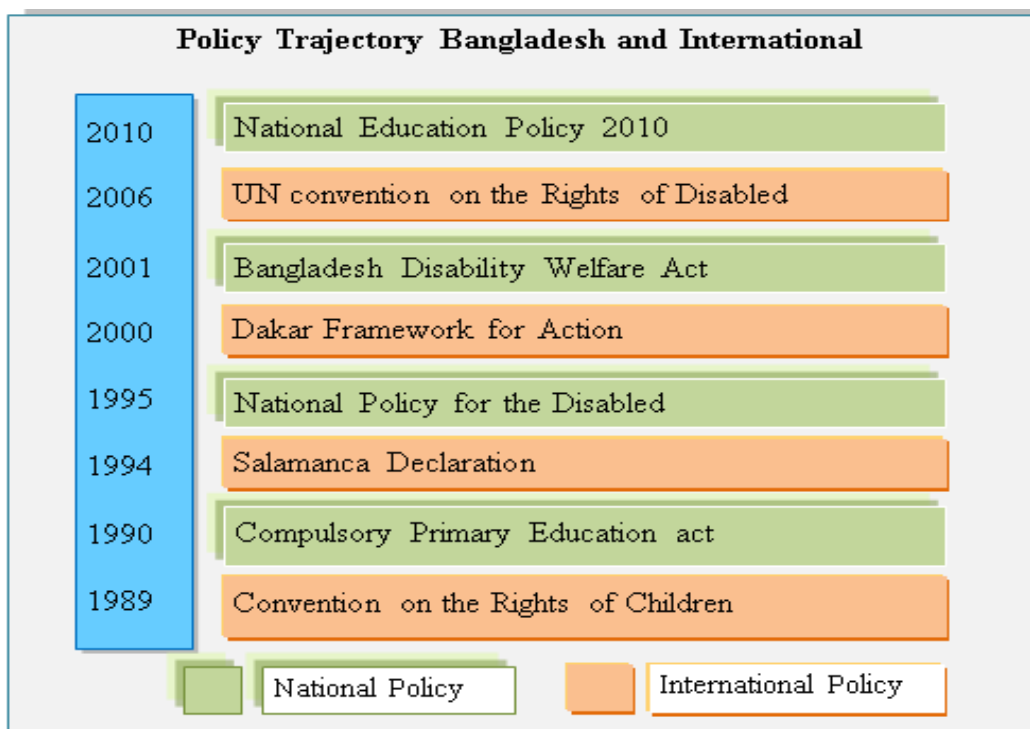
### Context of the study

The implement of inclusive education is yet at an early stage in Bangladesh. However, it can be claimed that Bangladesh has undertaken a good number of policy initiatives to provide equity and access of all children to education. The need for universal education for all children, regardless of any special circumstances, has been echoed from the birth of this country through its constitution in 1972. Article 17 and 28 of the constitution clearly utters how the state should provide education to all children without making any discrimination.

[Article 28 (3)]: 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 (Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs [MoLJPA], 2000, p. 5).

[Article 17 (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” (MoLJPA, 2000, p. 8).

Agreeing with all the international treaties, Bangladesh has committed to address IE within the existing education system. Like many other countries around the world, Bangladesh has agreed with the declaration of Education For All (EFA) (UNESCO, 1990), the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education (UNESCO, 1994), the Dakar Framework for Action (UNESCO, 2000) and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities-UNCRPD in which education is to be provided to all children with an inclusive approach. In addition, Bangladesh also promised to achieve Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (United Nations, 2008), which also articulated the rights of all children into education through uniform system. It is important to note that the trend of enacting IE policy and legislation in Bangladesh is mainly based upon the international treaties. Figure 1 shows how Bangladesh government endorsed IE related policy and legislation soon after signing an international treaty.



**Figure 1: IE policy initiatives of Bangladesh**

The above figure shows that IE initiatives in Bangladesh have been embedded in different policy and legislations; including Compulsory Primary Education Act, 1990, National Education Policy for the Disabled, 1995, Bangladesh Persons with Disability Welfare Act, 2001 and National Education Policy, 2010. In addition, a Comprehensive Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) Policy has been drafted in 2012 for offering every child an effective IE environment through early childhood development. This is to note that National Policy for the Disabled-1995 has been incorporated in the Bangladesh Persons with Disability Welfare Act, 2001. Thus, the above mentioned five policy documents are recognized as the key policy initiatives of inclusive education in Bangladesh. In order to get overall policy features regarding IE, we, therefore, included these five particular documents in our analysis.

To practice IE in accordance with the policy initiatives, Bangladesh government has been running two influential programs named as Primary Education Development Programs (PEDPs) and Teaching Quality Improvement in Secondary Education Program (TQI-SEP). In the government document, PEDP and TQI-SEP have been recognized as the means through which inclusive education is to be practiced in classrooms. The first one has been running for more than a decade and second one for 8 years. However, limited study has scrutinized the impact of these two major programs on IE practice in classroom level. Our analysis, therefore, included these two major programs with an aim to see how IE practice is aligned with the IE policies endorsed by the government of Bangladesh.

**Methodology**

The main purpose of this study was to critically examine the notion of inclusive education in the education policy context of Bangladesh and the corresponding practice in education setting. This study was supported by mainly document and literature review. In this approach, we have summarized empirical studies and authentic documents. In addition, we, as teacher educator and being involved in various level with PEDP and TQI-SEP implementation and evaluation process, have used our own research experiences to address the main research questions which were ended up at a holistic interpretation of IE policy and practice.

This chapter provides the summary of a detailed review of 10 studies which have been published in national and international journals, and 7 government documents published by the Directorate of Primary Education (DPE), Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education (DSHE), Asian Development Bank (ADB) and Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). All the articles published after 2005 were selected for this review. Most of these documents were collected using search engine Google/Google scholar. The search process used some key terms that includes: inclusive education, inclusion, national policy, special educational needs, gender, indigenous groups, marginalized and socio-economically vulnerable, secondary and primary teacher, and Bangladesh.

A reader protocol was also developed based on research question that focus on IE policies and practices (appendix). The documents on policy and practise were analyzed by using this protocol. The protocol allowed us to gain empirical knowledge by eliciting meaning and understanding embedded in the content/texts (words) of the documents. The documents were thoroughly examined and interpreted rigorously.

**Table 1: Major Policy and Programme documents reviewed*****Policy Documents***

The Compulsory Primary Education (CPE) Act 1990  
Bangladesh Persons with Disability Welfare Act-2001  
National Education Policy (NEP) 2010

***Program Documents***

PEDP

- 
- Project Proforma for Primary Education Development Programme II
  - Project Compilation Report

#### TQI-SEP

- Project Proforma for Teaching Quality Improvement in Secondary Education Project (TQI-SEP)
  - Teaching quality improvement in secondary education project: Reports and recommendations of the president, Asian Development Bank
  - Project profile for Teaching Quality Improvement in Secondary Education, Canadian International Development Agency
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## Policy guideline for IE in Bangladesh

By and large Inclusive Education in Bangladesh is policy focused. For over a decade or so the government of the country has taken some major steps that legitimize and forward the practice of inclusive education in the reality. The aim of this section is to detail the legislative or constitutional framework in which policy choices are made with regard to inclusion in the two education systems, namely primary and secondary education.

The guideline for IE in Bangladesh can be traced back to the policy documents developed in 1990s. Compulsory Primary Education Act, appeared in 1990, is the first government policy in which the education for the children with special needs was brought under legal jurisdiction. A number of national policy guidelines have been in government's central agenda to implement inclusive education and to obtain the goal of education for all. The following sections present a critical analysis of the government major policy guidelines.

### The Compulsory Primary Education (CPE) Act 1990

In line with the education for all (EFA) declaration, The Compulsory Primary Education Act (CPE) Act has been enacted in Bangladesh in 1990. Primary education has been declared compulsory and free for all children by this Act. Based on the CPE Act parents can be fined if they do not send their children to school. It is, however, important to note that there are a number of sections which conflict with the goals of education for all. For example, section 27.3.3 (e) states that "The decision of a primary education officer that it is not desirable to enter a child in a primary education institute on account of its being mentally retarded" (MOPME, 1990, p. 1). Therefore, this section might have been added to protect the parents of children who are intellectually challenged, this particular section directly against of inclusion as it indicates segregation of children with SEN.

Although the primary education was declared free, it is evident that after 23 years since the adaptation of this Act, the goal of education for all has not been achieved (Islam, 2011). One of the arguments of this limited success is that the policy was not being supported based on the socio-economic context of Bangladesh. The opportunity cost for each children, particularly in the rural Bangladesh remains high, which might have refrained parents from sending their children to schools (Chowdhury, Chowdhury, Hoque, Ahmed & Sultana, 2009; Sabates, Hossain & Lewin, 2010). Other than opportunity cost, the policy failed to recognize accessory cost, parents' expectation on educational outcome (Hossain, 2011), school accessibility (Khanam, 2008; Sabates et al., 2010), flexibility of student contact hour with local context, engagement of local and parents actively (Malak, 2013), field level monitoring affordability and over all awareness regarding schooling.

### Bangladesh Persons with Disability Welfare Act - 2001

In order to meet the commitments of Salamanca statement, 1994 and Dakar Framework, 2002, the first legislation on disability was made in 2001 named 'Bangladesh Persons with Disability Welfare (BPDW) Act'. The Act is comprehensive in terms of covering different aspects of persons with disabilities including definition, education, health care, employment, transport facilities, social security and so on. Particularly, in education, this Act has been recognized as the very first initiative to

ensure education as a legislative right for children with disabilities. The Act postulates-

Create opportunities for free education to all children with disabilities below 18 years of age and provide them books and equipments free of cost or at low-cost. (Part D:2). (Ministry of Social Welfare [MSW], 2001)

Despite having several important initiatives for students with SEN, the Act itself can be considered as barriers to inclusive education for children with SEN. First of all, this Act seems to lean on medical model of disability (Šiška & Habib, 2012). The definition of a person with disabilities articulated on the basis of clinical feature of the individual. For instance, a person with visual impairment is referred to as “ i. No vision in any single eye, or ii. in both eyes, or iii. visual acuity not exceeding 6/60 or 20/200 ...” (MSW, 2001). Consequently, in section D (1), the Act suggests segregated school setting for students with SEN.

To encourage establishment of Specialised Education Institutions to cater to the special needs of the special categories of children with disabilities, to design and develop specialised curriculum and write special text books and to introduce Special Examination System, if situations so demand. (MSW, 2001, p. 11)

Interestingly, in the third section the act calls for creating opportunity for the children with disability to study in the mainstream education.

Endeavor to create opportunities for integration of students with disabilities in the usual class-set-up of regular normal schools wherever possible (MSW, 2001, p. 12).

Since the act has been enacted from medical and charity point of view, the act remains weak to articulate inclusive education for the children with SEN. It is also to note that this act has been initiated by the Ministry of Social Welfare instead of Ministry of Education or Law Justice and parliamentary affairs. It implies that disability has been perceived as charity by policy makers (Šiška & Habib, 2012). It can be argued that due to welfare attitudes towards disability, the education of students with SEN have not been considered as a right. As a result, inclusive education has not been stated clearly through this act.

## National Education Policy (NEP) 2010

The National Education Policy 2010 was formally approved by the Parliament of Bangladesh in December 2010. It is worth mentioned that NEP 2010 was revised modified and finalized from the very first version available in 2000. This policy is another official commitment of the government towards inclusive education. In its foreword, the Minister of Education underscored that ensuring quality education for all children is a fundamental issue (Ministry of Education, 2010, p. vi). The NEP 2010 calls for every child in education. The NEP highlights the education for diverse learners within its main objectives as follows:

- 22: Bringing all socio-economically disadvantaged children into education including street-children;
- 23: Ensuring the scopes of development of cultural and linguistic characteristics of all the indigenous [[and ethnic groups in Bangladesh;
- 24: Ensuring the rights of all children with disabilities. (Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 1-2).

Further, a number of statements described in the NEP 2010 documents relate to quality and inclusive education facets. Table 2 displays the summary of major inclusion focused statements and in different chapters. These statements focuses on both primary and secondary education sectors, learners and teachers including teacher learning, gender, ethnic community children, special need children, socio-economically disadvantaged children, homeless children and language of the children who speak other than Bangla. Mainstreaming and special education are also included in these statements. Notwithstanding, none of the policy statements directly uses the term inclusion or inclusive education, broadly they can be considered to have explicit or implicit link to different aspects of inclusive education. Critical analysis of the policy statements suggests that most of the statements are broad or vague and often unclear in indicating specific meaning. National Education Policy 2010 comprises a number of sections that underpin education for all children. However, it is not clarified in the policy if

these children with SEN will get access to the same school with their regular peers. No specific guidelines have been given for inclusion of them. Instead, in some statements, ‘special education provision’ is suggested for the education of the children with special needs. For example, section 18 (7) states- “Separate schools will be established according to special needs and in view of the differential nature of disabilities of the challenged children” (MoE, p. 43). Some vocabularies seem clearly contradict with the philosophy of inclusion. For example, in chapter 18, the words “handicapped”, “dump” etc. are used to describe the children with special needs. This reflect and an attitude (of policy makers) that is aligned with segregation rather than inclusion. This is rather contradictory to the notion of inclusive education. Therefore, education reform based on policy statements such as the above may subside the effective implementation of inclusion at the school level of Bangladesh.

**Table 2: Key Statements of National Education Policy 2010 regarding Inclusive Education**

<i>Location and description of policy statement</i>	<i>Themes</i>
<b>Chapter 2: Pre-Primary and Primary Education, (p. 5, 8)</b> <b>Subtitle: Primary-aims and objectives</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Facilitate learning of indigenous and ethnic groups in their mother languages when they are at primary level</li> <li>· Ensure equal opportunities for all kinds of disabled and underprivileged children</li> <li>· Ensure the availability of teachers from ethnic groups</li> </ul>	<p>Ethnic</p> <p>Equity, Special need children</p> <p>Ethnic representation</p>
<b>Chapter 4: Secondary Education, Subtitle: Aims and Objectives (p. 13)</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Alleviate discriminations among various socio-economic, ethnic and socially disadvantaged children;</li> <li>· Provide special facilities to the schools that are in disadvantaged area</li> </ul>	<p>Reducing discrimination</p>
<b>Chapter16: Women's Education (p. 40)</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Extend girls participation in institutional education and reduce girls’ dropout rate from schools</li> </ul>	<p>Gender, Access, retention</p>
<b>Chapter 18: Subtitle: Education for challenged learners: (p. 43)</b> <b>Special education, Aims and Objectives</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Include students with special needs (handicapped) in the mainstream education</li> <li>· Provide special education to acutely handicapped children with physical or mental disability</li> </ul>	<p>Mainstreaming</p> <p>Special education</p>
<b>Chapter 24: Teachers’ Training, Aims and Objectives (p. 57, 58)</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Increase teachers’ efficiency in using strategies for educational innovation;</li> <li>· Encourage teachers to teach all students irrespective of religion, race and socio-economic conditions maintaining equal opportunities</li> <li>· Assist teachers to acquire efficiency to deliver lessons to students from disadvantaged and ethnic community and disabled learners by considering their special (learning) needs</li> </ul>	<p>Professional learning,</p> <p>Inclusive practice</p>

### Comprehensive Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) Policy Draft

In 2012, the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MOWCA) initiated a Comprehensive Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) Policy (MOWCA, 2012). Inclusion through early childhood has been focused in this policy. The policy underpins early participation in education for all children irrespective of special needs, ethnicity and economic status through inclusion. One of the significant features of this policy is to undertake screening measures for children with SEN and to provide supports within 3 years from birth (MOWCA, 2012, p. 16). Furthermore, it highlights-

Ensure growth and development of children with special needs so that they can be included in the mainstream without any discrimination.

Ensure growth and development of children from tribes, minority groups and those who are disadvantaged and at the backward sections of the society so that their quality can be reached at the national standard without showing any discrimination.(MOWCA, 2012, p.13).

Since this policy caters inclusive education through early childhood, this might promote students as well as their teachers to experience more inclusive culture in regular schools. The following table (Table 2) provides information in the education policy that supports the values of inclusive education:

**Table 3: Summary of the policy analysis**

<i>Key policies</i>	<i>Key ideas</i>	<i>Concerns</i>
CPEA,1990	Legitimize Education for all	Part of the statements regarding enrollment of the children with special needs contradicts with inclusive education philosophy.
PWDWA, 2001	Establishing rights of SEN students to education	Medical model of disability has been emphasized. It encourages design and develop specialized curriculum and special examination system which favors special education provision rather than inclusive education
NEP, 2010	National guidelines on quality education for all	IE has been spelt out in the policy, but there are some sections in which segregated education has been suggested for children with special educational needs. Specific guidelines have not been provided on how teachers would be supported inclusive education practice.
ECCD, 2012	Provision for IE through early childhood program	Mainly health care focused, socio-psychological approach is less emphasized. Children are expected to be fit in to the school system rather than the schools to be modified for the children.

It can be mentioned that all the policies described above implicitly or explicitly, vaguely or specifically included many facets of inclusive education. Policies are considered as guiding principles for practice. Therefore, each of the above policies separately or together has implications for practice. The following section concentrates on presenting some evidence of IE practice in the real educational setting of Bangladesh

### **Inclusive education practice in real setting**

Bangladesh has a very centralized education system and the government plays the central role in implementing inclusive education. As mentioned earlier, two major programs namely PEDP and TQI-SEP are involved to implement inclusive education in regular schools. The following sections describes how IE has been practice through these two programs.

#### **Primary Education Development Program (PEDP)**

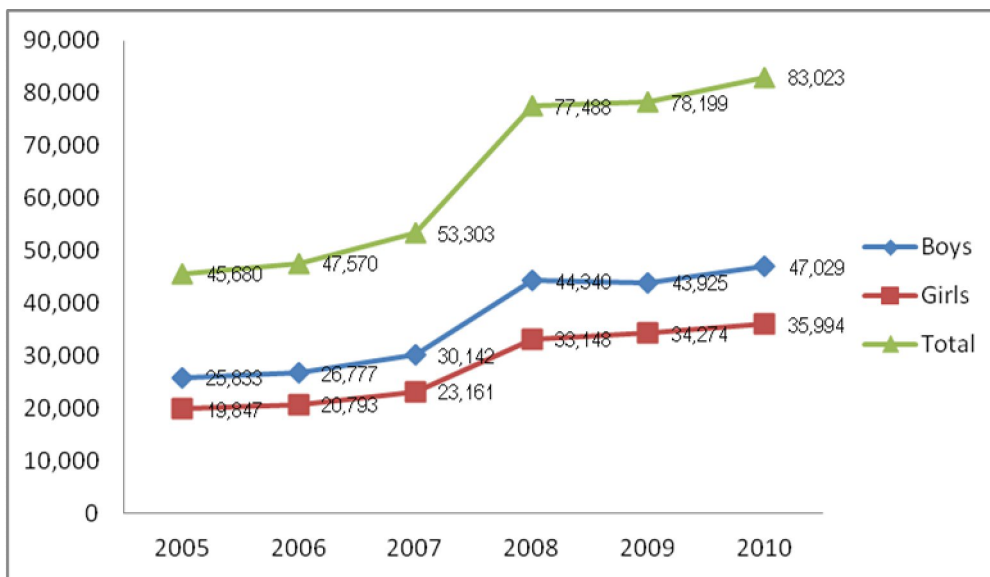
Primary Education Development Program (PEDP) is an umbrella program of Bangladesh government to enhance primary education. The program has been running under a number of series since 1997. The first program (1997-2003) focused on the gross enrollment rate in primary education. As part of this purpose, the first program “addressed the needs of the marginalized groups of children in a limited manner” (Ahuja & Ibrahim, 2006, p.21). However, the second program (2004-2011) incorporated a specific component on inclusive education to address diversity in the regular school system. Within Directorate of Primary Education (DPE), an Access and Inclusive Education Cell (AIEC) has established in 2005 that was responsible for initiating efforts in inclusion. The second PEDP

developed an Inclusive Education Framework to implement inclusive education across the country. The framework included four specific target groups; Gender, children with SEN, children from ethnic background and children from vulnerable group (e.g. slum children, refugee children, street children, orphans, children from ultra poor families etc.) to bring them into regular classrooms. Action plans for this framework was consisted of number of activities from language support for ethnic children, modifying school environment for students with SEN to stipend program for students from economically vulnerable families. Second PEDP also made massive training program for the teacher, Head teachers and local education administrators on inclusive education.

**Achievements and challenge**

Study shows PEDP-II has made important strides forward in terms of social inclusion during its early years (Ahuja & Ibrahim, 2006; Nasrin & Tate, 2007). However, the goals of full inclusion is far to achieve.

*Enrolment.* Under PEDP, a formal declaration has been made by the Directorate of Primary Education that students with SEN would not be denied of their enrollment from regular school. This declaration was the first government initiative to provisionally ensure the admission of students with SEN in regular school. BANBEIS (2011) has documented the enrollment figures of Children with SEN for six consecutive years (from 2005 to 2010) presented in Figure 2. The figure clearly shows that the number of enrolled SEN children have been nearly doubled within a five-year duration.



**Figure 2: Trend in enrolment of children with SEN at primary level**

The baseline survey conducted in 2005 revealed that 45,680 children with SEN were accommodated in primary schools and among them a significant number students were with intellectual disabilities (PEDP Completion Report, 2011). The enrolment of special needs children increased by 5% each year (Annual Sector Performance Report, Directorate of Primary Education, 2010). However, the exact number of school aged children with SEN has not been identified any report. Figure 2 shows an increased trend in SEN children enrollment though; the proportion of enrollment could not be computed to see the gap due to the absence of children with SEN population.

*Training.* IE training has been provided to huge number of teachers from almost all parts the country (approximately 88% of subdistricts/Upazilas). According to DPE (2007) the number of teachers who have participated in this training is 6,500. However, in the contemporary research conducted in Bangladesh suggests that there is further need of effective training on inclusive education (Ahsan,



Sharma & Deppeler, 2012). The pre-service teacher training curriculum has been revised and included inclusive education issues (Hossain, 2008). Yet, there are evidences suggesting lack of teachers' knowledge of disability (Malak, 2013) and inclusive pedagogy (Das & Ochiai, 2012). Further teachers had limited familiarization with the existing policy, laws and legislation about education of students with disabilities and different ethnic backgrounds (Sarker & Davey, 2009). Cross-cultural studies consistently show that lack of understanding influences teachers' attitudes negatively towards teaching (Forlin, Loreman, Sharma, 2007). The theory of Planned Behaviour claimed that attitude is the most significant factor to influence teachers' action (Ajzen, 1991). In Bangladesh, research shows the link between teachers' positive attitudes towards disability and their intended behaviours (Ahmed, Sharma & Deppeler, 2012). A teacher's comment on teaching a Deaf child,

This boy is always shy, not sociable and spontaneous like others ... so it is difficult for me to involve him in activities ... I don't feel he is comfortable working with other children. As you can see I have large numbers too, so it is not an easy thing to cater to individual differences or disabilities. (Banu, 2013, p.189)

Other than teacher training, the PEDP second program also organized trainings for the local education authority (Educations officers, URC instructors) to support the school to implement inclusive education. In addition to this, inclusive education consultants were recruited in each of the districts to provide expert services at the field.

In terms of numbers, training for local education authority and teachers are quite notable (conducted inclusive education training for 2,790 UEOs, AUEOs and URC Instructors from all 502 Upazila). However, there are limited information we know on what extent these training have impacted on teachers' attitude and their teaching practices. Das (2011) study shows that the most of the training manuals were not effective for preparing teachers to teacher students with SEN in the regular classroom.

*School support.* For the purpose of providing basic education to children in remote areas, a good number of new infrastructures have been developed under the second PEDP. It is also mentionable that some additional facilities (e.g., ramps, modification of classroom furniture etc.) were added to the existing school infrastructure for providing access to children having SEN. However, in the annual sector performance report 2012 shows that the infrastructural development has not been achieved as it was targeted (DPE, 2012). Also, recent Malak's study (2013) demonstrated teachers' disappointments on inadequate classroom facilities.

In addition to infrastructure, the role of SMC has been consistently suggested as a major support for implementing inclusive education at the school. However, though the massive training has been provided, studies (Malak, 2013; Mullick, Deppeler, & Sharma, 2012) found that due to the lack of awareness of the SMC members regarding disability, inclusive education initiatives is facing challenges. Therefore, it implies that the sensitization program through SMC training is inadequate.

One of the challenges of the program was to bring the children with ethnicity in the classroom. The program itself evaluated that "due to the lack of institutional experience and capacity, opportunities for special needs, tribal and vulnerable children have not been created to the expected level" (project completion report for PEDPII, cited in DPE, 2012). In a study conducted in the northern part of Bangladesh, Sarker and Davey (2009) also found that language was one of the aspects inhibited a large percentage of children with ethnicity to participate in the primary education.

## Teaching Quality Improvement in Secondary Education Project (TQI-SEP)

In order to enhance the quality of secondary education the Government of Bangladesh has undertaken a number of initiatives. Teaching Quality Improvement in Secondary Education Project (TQI-SEP) was one of the initiatives, among others, to address the equity and quality aspects in the secondary education of Bangladesh. This project was jointly funded by the Government of Bangladesh (GOB), Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). It was formally launched in 2005 and closed in 2012. The Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education (DSHE) worked as the implementing agency (Project Management Unit) under the purview of the Ministry of Education (MOE) along with the project's two partner organizations National University and National Academy for Educational Management (NAEM). The estimated total cost of the Project was equivalent to US\$108.7 million. Being an executive agency, ADB financed the major share (63%)

of the cost as loan to the GOB, CIDA's contribution was 17% and GOB's shared the rest 20% of the cost (ADB, 2004, p. v). This can be termed as first TQI-SEP because there is now the second TQI-SEP which is running from 1012.

The project was developed on the ground that the secondary education sector in Bangladesh is facing some major problems that are either directly or indirectly related to exclusions. In its inception document ADB (2004) has identified a substantial number of problems that are embedded within the structural and process features of secondary education sector in Bangladesh. Major problems include access to school (very low gross enrolment rate, about 25%), lack of quality education for learners (absence of essential teaching conditions as most secondary teachers were found to be professionally untrained, theory-oriented teacher education curriculum), high dropout rate, decline in students' achievements, and low percentage of female teachers (ADB, 2004; 2010). Recognizing these problems the TQI-SEP was initiated by setting its main goal to improve the quality of all students' learning through improved teaching quality (ADB, 2004). It was expected that improvement in the quality of teaching would in turn improve students' enrolment and also their achievement (Dean, 2006).

### *Intervention area of TQI-SEP*

Considering the basic goal of achieving improved classroom instructions, the project concentrated on four key areas. These were Organizational Development and Capacity Building; Improving Teacher Training Facilities; Strengthening In-Service and Pre-Service Teacher Training and Increasing Equitable Access and Improving Community Involvement (DSHE, 2005).

As part of the broader goal of achieving quality secondary education in Bangladesh, the project adopted substantial measures for the implementation of inclusive education. The main goal of the project was to strengthening the provisions/opportunities for equitable access of all eligible children (with primary completion) in to the secondary classrooms and underpinning their participation in all relevant activities within school or classroom setting. In believing that teachers play the most important role in enhancing students' learning (ADB, 2004), the project was involved in strategic planning for assisting teachers to develop necessary knowledge and skills that would empower teachers to create learner-friendly environment which in turn would allow effective learning for all children regardless of disability, gender, geographical location, and ethnicity (DSHE, 2007). The project had recognized that the secondary teachers would require inclusive teaching practice skills for supporting effective learning of all children.

Within the scope of the project's philosophy, teacher professional learning was seen as a comprehensive part of a total inclusive setting/environment. Thus, in addition to professional learning opportunities the project plan included a range of supportive activities to enhance the implementation of IE at real classroom setting. Improving physical facilities (to remove the barrier to physical movement), modifying teacher education curriculum, introducing continuous professional development (CPD) was enhanced under one component of the project; while strengthening classroom teachers with the provisions for inclusive practice was another significant strand included in the subject based professional development activities.

Under the project a number of reform activities were undertaken to enhance IE in the secondary education sector. The major activities include, developing and implementing "gender action plan" for reducing gender disparity and ensuring gender-friendly learning environment; strengthening school capacity to provide effective learning environment for all children including girls and children with special needs; Inclusive Education (IE) Awareness Raising Program for Head teachers and members of School Management Committee (consisted of Head teacher, classroom teacher representative, parents representative, and representative of local community); IE Awareness Raising Program for district level officers (District Education Officers-DEO) and Zonal officers (nine zones of the country); IE Orientation Program for teacher educators from TTCs and relevant NGO representatives; Professional Development program for secondary in-service teachers; revision of teacher training curriculum by incorporating issues on gender and inclusive education and CPD for pre- and in-service secondary teachers.

In order to support these activities the project prepared and supplied necessary equipment and materials. Materials for teacher instructional improvement include curriculum/content for professional development of IE, Modules and IE Resource Book for inclusive concept and practice, and IE booklet and posters for conception and awareness building.

One of the specific focuses of the project was to equip pre- and in-service secondary teachers with necessary knowledge and skills that are appropriate for enhancing effective instruction for all students. To achieve this goal, all eligible teachers of grades 6-10 were involved in professional development program and activities. These teachers were drawn from both government and private secondary schools in Bangladesh (ADB, 2008).

In order to prepare teachers for inclusive practice, the project picked three districts of the country. In the project documents these districts are termed as outreach districts (DSHE, 2005) and were considered as vulnerable to basic resources and facilities (e.g., lack of female teachers, absence of untrained teachers, inappropriate teaching materials, classroom environment etc.) required for effective teaching-learning. The target was to select on an average 33 secondary schools and 1000 teachers from each district. In total, 3000 in-service secondary teachers were supposed to be received a professional development program to equip themselves with knowledge and skills required for inclusive practice. For supporting teachers' practice in classrooms, the project provided an IE orientation program for school management committee members of each of these schools.

### ***Key achievements***

The project implementation unit (DSHE) and the partner organizations (such as, ADB, CIDA) have highlighted some of the project's achievements within and at the end of project period. It seems that the reports concentrate more on providing descriptions of input and process than on change achieved. By and large the project has prepared and disseminated various policy papers on gender and inclusive education, involved teachers in professional development activities, head teachers and SMC members in awareness raising activities, teacher educators in Master trainer programs (ADB, 2010). In a recent report CIDA (2012) has documented some achievement when the project was in its last year regarding students' achievement, teacher professional learning opportunities and community awareness building. ADB (2010) has described some information regarding gender and inclusive education situation.

*Students' achievement.* CIDA (2012) claims that secondary teachers' participation in the TQI-SEP professional development activities has made a positive impact on the students' achievement based on Secondary School Certificate (SSC) result. According to this report, SSC examinations of 2011 showed an increase in pass rates from 52.5% at the start of the project in 2005 to 67.4 % in 2009. The pass rate further increased to 82.1% in 2011 and 86.37% in 2012.

*Teacher professional learning opportunities.* By May 2011, 14,530 students had successfully completed the pre-service one-year Bachelor of Education Program in Government teacher training colleges; 14,500 practicing teachers have taken the initial basic module of a 3-month secondary teaching certificate (STC); 195,000 teachers have taken the first continuous professional development (CPD) of a series of three CPD programs to use participatory teaching approaches in the classroom, instead of rote learning. From the three outreach districts 1650 classroom teachers had received professional development on inclusive practices. They constituted the 55% of the initially targeted 3000 teachers. It is also reported that 555 newly appointed head teachers have received their initial 35 days administrative training (CIDA, 2012).

*Community awareness.* In a monthly progress report in January 2011, it was reported that a total number of 45203 SMC members received awareness training on IE. In addition, 600 community members participated in Community Awareness Program on Gender and IE (personal communication, January).

Moreover, a total of 463 teacher educators have received long term/short term overseas training to strengthen their professional knowledge. With regard to increasing women teachers in secondary schools up to 30%, the number of women teachers reached to 22% by 2010 (ADB, 2010). As a result of this program, these teachers are expected to be able to deal with issues of gender, special educational needs and education for ethnic populations.

### ***Beyond input and process: Change in practice***

Change in classroom practice was one of the foremost targets of the TQISE project as legacy of the policies described earlier. It is expected that change in classroom practice in turn would change

students' learning quality. Improved classroom practice depends on what teachers know/learn, and how they have learned and acquired skills. This section presents some glimpses of teachers' knowledge and classroom practice as a result of the project's professional learning initiatives. Some of these findings are based on one of the author's PhD (ongoing) data.

In a recent study, Khan (2012) argues that secondary teachers have different interpretations about the concepts of inclusive education. These teachers' felt that they had inadequate understanding about IE concept. In their understanding IE is fairly vague and broader rather than focused and specific. These teachers have attended the CPD offered by the project. The teachers believed that they would require more time on IE in their CPD. The field data from another ongoing study shows that the secondary teachers felt that not only duration of professional development but also the delivery mode of IE topics by the trainers needed to be clearer. It was reflected in one teacher's voice as "it would have been easier for us to understand the IE topics if the trainer sir would present the topic more slowly"<sup>1</sup>(Field data, 2010). An analysis indicates that professional development activities designed by the TQI-SEP were more aligned with conventional off-site approach.

Classroom observation of teacher practice implies that there have been some changes in the instructional behaviours in relation to inclusive practice. Teachers, who have attended professional development activities for inclusive practice, added few elements of inclusive practice in their everyday teaching (conventional teacher-centered teaching), such as, repositioning students before starting the lesson for better participation, providing opportunities for cooperative learning, explaining lessons using known experience etc. Statistical comparisons of pre-stage and post-stage teaching data were significant for some of these behaviours. However, some important elements which are among the core inclusive practices were not found in the instructional behaviours of these teachers. For example, teachers were not appeared to be taken the responsibility of individual learning, they didn't clarify or share the learning goal and success criteria with the students. Moreover, teachers lack skills for involving students into active learning process.

Therefore, it can be argued that there is some changes in the classroom practices as a result of TQI-SEP professional learning, however, that is often not appropriate or sufficient to address the diverse needs of the all learners. Khan (2012) considered insufficient teacher professional learning opportunities as a dominant issue on the ways of implementing IE at the secondary level education. While authors' field experience suggests that lack of good quality professional development is a significant barrier for empowering secondary teachers with inclusive instructional knowledge and skills. Evidence suggests that engaging classroom teachers in to high quality professional development is inherent for inclusive practice (OECD, 2005). In short, the TQI-SEP professional development activities have created some awareness or enthusiasm about inclusion among the secondary teachers. However, the practice of inclusion in their classroom instruction is far to reach.

### *Facing the challenges*

Under TQI-SEP, all secondary teachers were not provided with the IE professional learning opportunities. Therefore, the scope of the professional learning opportunities needs to be extended nationwide. Moreover, high quality professional learning opportunities for all teachers and school-based supports are inherent ingredient for successful IE. Designing high quality learning opportunities require the providers to take the local context in to consideration; serious attention is required to listen to teachers' and other stakeholders experiences.

It is claimed that positive impact of the project is reflected in the increase of SSC pass rate to 82% (CIDA, 2012), but IE would be fully realized if the significant number of students (18%) is included in the list of successful achievers. With respect to gender issue, the number of women teachers in secondary school is still far below the target of 30% (ADB, 2010). This was considered as one of the key indicator of inclusive classroom environment. In addition, inclusion of women member in the SMC is yet to achieve the target. These challenges can be addressed through the second TQI-SEP which is currently underway.

### **Concluding remarks**

Polices enacted over the last 20 years have marked with few milestones towards inclusive education

reform. Within these years, free and Compulsory primary education for all, establishing right to access to education for the children with SEN, teaching through mother language for the children from ethnic community are few of them. However, there are some issues embedded in the policies, laws or legislations that clearly oppose the philosophy of inclusive education and weaken the practice. These unclear policy guidelines make a niche for conceptual confusion among the practitioners and classroom teachers regarding IE which in turn impedes its implementation in classrooms. Evidence suggests that conceptual variation or absence of a common language regarding IE (Ainscow, 2005; Ainscow & Miles, 2009) is one of the major barriers to the successful implementation of inclusion. Thus, the existing policy environment generate constrains and contradictions when attempts are made towards inclusion.

We have shown that our national level IE policies are mostly followed by the international policies. Therefore it can be hardly expected that the IE guidelines are underpinned by the inclusion philosophy that fit to national context. Even within the national context, a noticeable feature of IE policies is that they are imposed from the center to periphery. This means teachers and other stakeholders do practice what the providers want and the ways they want. Educators have expressed their concerns regarding the increased trend of pursuing top-down and de-contextualised policies where equity is narrowly equated with improved examinations achievements (Ainscow & Goldrick, 2010). This approach is subject to serious criticism. It is well established that IE is a context-oriented phenomena.

It is also suggested that IE sustains within an environment of collaborative enquiry where policy makers, practitioners and other stakeholders work together to understand the school culture and focus on the practical solution of problems (Ainscow, 2005) or reducing barriers to learning faced by some learners (Ainscow, 2007). However, in our national policies (e.g., NEP 2010) there are no specific guidelines for practicing collaboration or enhancing sharing culture. Experience suggests that the teachers in Bangladesh feel hesitant or maintain egoistic values that encourage them not to 'public the self' as ignorant of the subject or problems.

It can be contended that as a result of policies, adopting initiatives for practice become obligatory which is reflected through the two major programs TQI-SEP and PEDP for implementing inclusive education in primary and secondary education. Under these programmes schools and teachers are ready, at least officially, to accept all children in to their classrooms. As a result, enrolment of special needs, girls, disadvantaged children and children from ethnic community has been increased in both primary and secondary schools. Moreover, teachers in Bangladesh have been trained for the first time in inclusive education. Many of the schools have been equipped with facilities like ramps, furniture and assistive devices. It is to question how many of them are under these facilities in real context.

However, these policies have little impact in challenging teachers' beliefs as well as their practice. The study has shown that there is a little change in the teachers' instructional behaviours (from conventional to inclusive practice); moreover, teachers were found to be possessing pessimistic views about the learning ability of children who have some disabilities or difficulties in learning. One of the undesirable issues is that the teachers' belief system has not been improved after attending the projects' professional learning activities. Evidence suggests that changed belief system is a significant factor for implementing new innovation such as inclusive education. Ahmed, Sharma and Deppeler (2012) strongly suggest that it is of utmost important that there should be some components that enhance and promote teachers positive belief system towards inclusive education (, 2012). Literature suggests that change in belief system is required for change in practice and good quality professional development is one of the tools for challenging individual's belief system (Ajzen, 1991)

Thus, in line with Senge (cited in Ainscow, 2005) we would like to argue that policy documents in relation to Bangladesh IE context tend to be low-leverage tools and they highlights the extrinsic change (the ways things look) but not the intrinsic change (the ways things work). This means these policies may have make a contribution but not necessarily they lead to change in thinking or practices.

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