



## **Embracing diversity in ASIA through the adoption of Inclusive Open Practices**

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Institutions and its Impact**

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# 1 Concise History and current status of Inclusive Education In Bangladesh

## 1.1 Inclusive Education and the Bangladesh Context

Bangladesh is a small Asian country that is progressively implementing inclusive education. Inclusive education means having an equal education provided to disabled children in every institution in Bangladesh. For whatever reason, no organisation can exclude the enrolment of any disabled student (ILO, 2013). According to the 2012 Pre-Primary Education Expansion Project, inclusive education involves having an acceptable education program that recognises and promotes the diversity of children (DPE, 2012). Although there have been overall advances in education achievement worldwide, disabled children are still among the most excluded groups. They are less likely to be involved in and pursue their education relative to those without impairments (WHO, 2011). Bangladesh has to about 40 million heterogeneous learners, who are provided with a huge and intricate education system (ADB, 2018). Education resources remain accessible through traditional and experiential learning modes offered and complemented by the government as well as non-profit communities. In a region where the prevalence of disability is 9.1 percent, social inclusion and equality for disabled children are becoming increasingly important in academic planning and strategies (UNESCAP, 2019). Due to active groups and a robust development structure, the government's view, and practices on disability inclusion in services such as education are transforming. Current legislation and rules include significant measures to support Bangladesh's initiatives to maintain that disabled students are educated in inclusive environments. This article aims to provide a comprehensive summary of Bangladesh's inclusive education policies and practices.

## 1.2 Policy and Regulatory Guidelines

The government has developed a regulatory environment that promotes individuals with disabilities to engage fully in society. Bangladesh does not truly have a foundation for inclusive education. Existing legislation, regulations, and obligations to the CRPD and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, on the other hand, ensure that all children receive an equal education. Bangladesh has been authorised through its 1972 Constitution to get such a "uniform, mass-oriented and universal system of education and extend free and compulsory education to all children" (Article 17) and protect its people against discrimination on the grounds of "religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth" in attempting to access or "admission to any educational institution" (Article 28) (Constituteproject.org, 1972). The Primary Education legislation of 1990 granted all children in any form of academic organisation access to compulsory primary education (MoPME, 1990). In 1995, the first National Disability Policy was enacted, establishing standards to guarantee that disabled people obtain accurate diagnosis, education, treatment, and employment, along with several other basic rights (CLCBD, 1995). In 1996, a framework to implement this policy was adopted. Bangladesh established a novel educational policy in the year 2000, which recognised the principle of incorporating special-needs children into conventional education (NFD, 2000). The Bangladeshi Parliament passed "The Bangladesh Persons with Disability Welfare Act (2001)", which is a substantial disability regulation (ILO, 2001). A National Coordination Committee on the Rights and Protection of Persons with Disabilities (charged with organising all government of Bangladesh impairment efforts) then established the National Disability Initiative on Disability in 2006 (BLAST, 2015). The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) was enacted by Bangladesh on November 30, 2007, and the objective of this report was to analyse the facts and

circumstances of disabled people in Bangladesh, to address civil rights issues, and to provide recommendations to the Bangladeshi government on how to ensure that initiatives to strengthen the rights of disabled people are successful (BLAST, 2019). Under the National Education Policy 2010, equitable prospects have been provided for all disabled and impoverished students and decreased distinctions among diverse socio-economic, ethnic, and socially disadvantaged children (Malak et al., 2013). Although the Rights and Protection of Persons with Disabilities Act of 2013 guaranteed equality and the right to education for people with impairments, it established a relatively restricted concept of inclusive education as schooling offered solely to children with special needs (ILO, 2013). The National Education Act of 2016 is intended to include regulations aimed at improving educational standards by ensuring that all children attend school (MoEDU, 2016). Despite the existence of key legal provisions that favour inclusion, there are requirements that directly or indirectly promote segregation. In the year 2019, an Integrated Special Education Policy came into place. Disability-inclusive education has had significant breakthroughs.

Table 1: Important disability and education legislation, plans, and practices Social laws, policies and programs

- Adoption Primary education (compulsory) act, 1990
- Constituted a national coordination council on disability under the ministry of social welfare, 1993
- National policy on disability, 1995
- Adopted Action plan on disability strategy for the execution of the national policy, 1996
- Established national organisation for the improvement of disabled persons, 2000
- Welfare Act for People with Disabilities, 2001
- Approved national plan of action-II, 2006
- Bangladesh's government adopted the UN convention on disabled persons, 2007
- Formed a disability rights monitoring committee and a nationwide council of law and legislative groups, 2009
- National education policy, 2010
- Rights and protection of persons with disabilities act, 2013
- Neurodevelopmental trust act 2013 Children act, 2013
- National education act, 2016
- (draft) Fourth primary education development program, 2018
- (ongoing) Integrated special education policy, 2019

Sources: (Islam & Juhara, 2021a; UNICEF, 2021)

According to the Seventh Five Year Plan (FY2016–FY2020), students with impairments and specific needs have received insufficient assistance. Inclusionary education initiatives are confined to children with moderate physical impairments, excluding those with more severe physical disabilities from school. Within the next five years, the government of Bangladesh intends to enhance funding for inclusive education (Seventh Five Year Plan FY2016–FY2020, 2015). One of the goals of the next 8th Five-year plan (2021–2025), which provides incentives to improve access to the educational system and other activities for disabled children, is to increase the number of "primary schools with accessible architecture and materials" for disabled children.

### 1.3 Implementation of Inclusive Education on an Actual Basis

Bangladesh has successfully adopted inclusive education throughout primary level according to the Primary Education Development Scheme (PEDP II scheme). Its ultimate purpose was to initiate quality education available to all primary school-aged children (UNESCO, 2004). To accomplish the aims of the PEDP II, two key aspects were introduced: the PEDP II innovation incentive and a decentralisation strategy.

Table 2: Educational institutions providing academic programs in special education Higher Education Institution

	BA degree	MA degree	Doctorate
Bangladesh Institute of Special Education	✓	✓	<input type="checkbox"/>
University of Dhaka	✓	✓	✓
University of Rajshahi	✓	✓	✓
University of Chittagong	✓	✓	<input type="checkbox"/>
University of Khulna	✓	✓	<input type="checkbox"/>
Jagannath University	✓	✓	<input type="checkbox"/>
Noakhali Science and Technology University	✓	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
National Institute for the Intellectually Disabled	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
National Centre for Special Education	✓	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Source: (Disability-Inclusive Education Practices in Bangladesh, 2021)

The PEDP II innovation incentives are designed to promote practical and creative approaches to raising the educational quality for impoverished students. The incentives were accessible from the PEDP II budget. Under PEDP II, the School- Level Improvement Plan (SLIP) and the Upazila Primary Education Plan (UPEP) promote decentralisation. From its inception, SLIP served as a platform to reduce the marginalisation of students who were underprivileged due to their gender, disabled children, ethnicity, or socioeconomic background. By involving community and government officials, UPEP was adopted. Now, the Fourth Primary Education Development Program 2018–2023 (PEDP4) supports the equality of opportunity for disabled students in education and aims to fulfil stated objectives set forth in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), notably SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 5 (Gender Equality) (UNESCO, 2018). In secondary education, the Teaching Quality Improvement (TQI)-SEP initiative has made significant strides to provide continual training assistance to secondary school teachers to keep them up to pace with modern educational advances, such as inclusive education (ADB, 2010).

In Bangladesh, NGOs are engaging in inclusive education-related projects. For example, Action in Development assesses the demands of different disabled children through regular visits and, if necessary, refers them towards other organisations that may offer suitable remediation. UNESCO

Dhaka has been working to create awareness about inclusive education and has published a number of publications to support the concept. Since 1998, the Bangladesh Protibandhi Foundation has been operating inclusive education approaches in a variety of schools. Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) offers inclusive physical and behavioural training for instructors and actively promotes children with disabilities to attend their non-formal schools by boosting community awareness. The University of Dhaka's Institute of Education and Research (IER) is also focusing on inclusive education concerns by carrying out research, creating human resources, and launching awareness-raising initiatives.

## 1.4 Key Achievements and Challenges for the Implementation of Inclusive Education Policies

Bangladesh has experienced tremendous growth in establishing gender equality in registration at both primary and secondary institutions during the last decade. It has also been successful in increasing primary attendance rates to 90% in 2019 (MOPME, 2019). According to Secondary School Certificate (SSC) result statistics, secondary teachers' engagement in TQI-SEP professional development programs has had a great impact on students' achievement. Acknowledging all children's educational rights and reemphasising policy and public initiatives on out-of-school children were appropriate beginning steps for Bangladesh's progress toward inclusive education. The innovation grant initiative was also a watershed moment for public-private collaborations in advancing inclusive education.

Recent research findings (Ahsan & Burnip, 2020; Islam & Juhara, 2021) from Bangladesh still reflect that obstacles to standard education for disabled children include:

- misleading perceptions about impairments,
- harsh realities of relatives, educators, caregivers, and friends towards disabled students,
- shortage of affordable amenities,
- insufficient trained educators,
- limitations of curriculum alteration and rationalisation,
- non-availability of unconventional pedagogical practices,
- a conventional evaluation process,
- insufficient educational tools,
- lack of disability inspection and assessment methods,
- poor government infrastructure programs,
- inadequacy of government grants entail.

Therefore, significant investments are required in emerging economies like Bangladesh to accomplish inclusive educational objectives.

## 1.5 Implementation of ICT for Solving the Current Inclusive Education Challenges

The inclusivity and accessibility of students with impairments in service delivery processes is a priority for the Bangladesh government's ICT strategy. Ongoing projects are being developed for the convenience of students with special needs:

- MuktoPaath e-learning platform: (a2i, 2020) Many learners, including those with disabilities, now have access to general, vocational, and lifelong education through MuktoPaath. On MuktoPaath, disadvantaged and marginalised people can acquire vocational education that

is relevant and advantageous to self-employment. MuktoPaath can be used by instructors, students, adolescents, working people, migrant workers, or families. MuktoPaath currently has 1.1 million active users and serves over 187 courses.

- Emporia web platform and mobile application: (EMPORIA, 2021) The Emporia app is available on both a web platform and as a mobile app. The online portal allows users access to an e-learning platform as well as an employment site, particularly developed for individuals with disabilities. Users install the mobile application on an Android mobile device. Emporia incorporates ICT classes as well as a "dynamic exam" system. The employment site provides individuals with disabilities with improved opportunities for employment and a better method to qualify for vacancies. The app features:
  - Dynamic reactions depending on the nature of the disability,
  - Ability for users to pursue their e-learning course either online or offline,
  - Progress tracking, retaking of tests, and reporting on or rating specific courses,
  - Creation of a CV and browsing for and applying for jobs.

Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities including Neurodevelopmental Disabilities [NDD] through ICT: (EPWDICT, 2020) This initiative intends to assist people with disabilities in developing ICT skills that will enable them to find work and contribute to a Digital Bangladesh.

The specific goals are:

- To create specialised audio and video tutorials on ICT training with voice and sign language assistance,
- Developing a specialized, interactive, and accessible national e-learning platform (web portal) for people with disabilities; and establishing a specialised ICT Resource Centre for people with disabilities (EMPORIA, 2021).

The Bangladesh Business Disability Network (BBDN) and the Bangladesh Association of Software and Information Services (BASIS) have teamed up to help physically challenged people gain access to information and communication technology. A goal of this partnership is to increase the number of BASIS organisation members who are actively working to become disability-inclusive by increasing their awareness. BASIS can play a critical role in creating legislation, working with the wider business group, and the government in order to provide a window of opportunity for job creation and set criteria for providing appropriate work settings for individuals with disabilities. BBDN could be a strategic partner for BASIS in dealing with disability inclusion issues and assisting BASIS members in taking advantage of the benefits of becoming an inclusive organisation (The Business Standard, 2021).

## 1.6 Conclusion

To strengthen inclusive education in Bangladesh, new initiatives based on the experiences of developed nations must be implemented. Bangladesh may deliberately build connection programs between mainstream education and special institutions to attain the purpose of inclusive education by increasing the inclusion of students in schools. Bangladesh has also established specific sections for students with visual impairments, which may be expanded to include students with other disabilities. It has established education resource centres within the District Education Department; however such departments need not meet the standards for enrolling children with disabilities in educational programs (CSID, 2020).



The understanding of Bangladesh's present inclusive scenario may be enhanced by further research into the effects and implications of policy and activities in aspects of the learning culture including teacher training programs, school management, and curricular variations.