

Attitudes of Head Teachers in Government Primary Schools towards the Inclusion of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder in Mainstream Education in Bangladesh

Md Muzibor Rahman^{1*}, Carmel Conn²

^{1*}Education Officer (Inclusive Education), Policy and Operation Division, Directorate of Primary Education, Ministry of Primary and Mass Education, Dhaka, Bangladesh.

²Senior Lecturer, MA SEN/ALN (Autism), School of Education, Early Years and Social Work, University of South Wales, UK.

***Corresponding Author:** Md Muzibor Rahman, Education Officer (Inclusive Education), Policy and Operation Division, Directorate of Primary Education, Ministry of Primary and Mass Education, Dhaka, Bangladesh.

Abstract

Introduction: In the last two decades, the implementation of Inclusive Education (IE) has been seen as a priority to ensure quality primary education for all children irrespective of need. Within the inclusion agenda, the mainstreaming of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) has gained in importance in many countries including Bangladesh. Though Bangladesh is at an early stage of implementing IE, recently the mainstreaming of children with ASD has increased rapidly with positive attitudes of head teachers seen as playing a key element in the successful inclusion of this population.

Objective: This study sought to gain a better understanding of head teachers' attitudes about the mainstreaming of children with ASD using a survey design.

Methods and Materials: A total of 73 government primary schools head teachers were selected from eight divisions within Bangladesh using purposively stratified random sampling. Participant's demographics, conceptual knowledge on ASD, attitudes towards ASD, barriers to mainstream of children with ASD and collaboration among the stakeholders were analyzed.

Results: Most of the participants have good understanding and general knowledge about inclusion and the mainstreaming of children with ASD. The majority of participants were very positive towards inclusion of children with ASD. There were mixed conceptions about community participations regarding the inclusion of children with ASD and the initiatives of the head teachers for involving them were more or less satisfactory.

Conclusion: Most of the head teachers were willing to mainstream the children with ASD. However, successful inclusion of children with ASD requires effective training for head teachers as well as adequate dedicated resources to support the mainstreaming of children with ASD under Inclusive Education.

Keywords: Attitudes, Autism, Autism spectrum disorder, Inclusive Education, Inclusion, Bangladesh, Head Teacher

BACKGROUND

In recent years globally, inclusion into mainstream education of children with special educational needs (SEN) has been established widely as a significant agenda focusing on the rights of all children to be

included in quality education regardless of their ability or disability or any form of disadvantages. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) prescribes inclusive education as a "process aimed at offering quality education for

Attitudes of Head Teachers in Government Primary Schools towards the Inclusion of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder in Mainstream Education in Bangladesh

all while respecting diversity and different needs and abilities, characteristics and learning expectations of students and communities, eliminating all forms of discrimination” (UNESCO, 2008b,p.18). The inclusion of all children in mainstream education has been accelerated based on a number of international policies such as the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action (UNESCO, 1994) and Dakar Framework for Action: Education for All (UNESCO, 2000) including the Jomtien World Declaration on Education for All (UNESCO, 1990) where IE was strongly emphasized the commitment of education systems to child-centred pedagogy, and cognizance of the diversity of individuals needs and forms of development among primary school children. Vaz et al. (2015) points out that the Salamanca Statement highlights the importance of providing quality education for all children under inclusion and has shaped as a goal in many countries the agenda of inclusive schools based on the concept of social justice. This means that all children are given equal access to all educational opportunities, regardless of disability or any form of disadvantage. Again, the Salamanca Conference on Special Needs Education (UNESCO, 2004) highlighted the importance of inclusion on the international educational agenda as a right of individuals with disabilities. Continuous with these initiatives, Bangladesh has now ratified many national and international conventions and initiatives including the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), the Salamanca Statement (1994) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) (2000). The government has made a commitment to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) (2015), eliminate gender disparities and achieve universal quality primary education for all children by 2030. The National Education Policy (NEP) (2010) reinforced the mandate of the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education (MoPME) as an agency charged in providing primary education services to learners with disabilities and its responsibility for ensuring standards and developing competence including evidence based knowledge, curriculum, teacher training and infrastructure. Based on the following constitutional and other obligations, the Government of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh is committed to ensuring the universal quality of primary education for all children without any discrimination. To implement these commitments, the Inclusive Education (IE) Framework and Action Plans have been developed under Directorate of Primary Education (DPE) for

mainstreaming those children who are still out of enrolment and are not attending schools. Mullick (2013) states that, as a developing country, Inclusive Education (IE) in Bangladesh is still at an initial stage of development. Another study revealed that confusion regarding the broad concept of Inclusive Education is prevalent in Bangladesh (Ahsan et al., 2011). Globally it is found that about 1 percent of the world population has autism spectrum disorder (CDC, 2014). Prevalence in the United States is estimated at 1 in 68 births (CDC, 2014). Like other countries in the world, currently more than 2500 mild and moderate types of children with ASD are enrolling in Government primary schools in Bangladesh (ASPR, 2016). It is assumed, moreover, that a large number of autistic children are not enrolling. But as a legitimate citizen of the country, every child has the right to receive primary education and the government is constitutionally liable to ensure their primary education. Research has shown that numbers of school-going children with ASD are increasing, including within mainstream education all over the world (Liu et al., 2016). This raises the question of how educational settings can prepare to provide quality education for those children? Or how quality education can be ensured? From that aspect over the past two decades, philosophies towards ensuring the education of children with special needs or children with ASD have changed dramatically and many countries have tried to implement policies with a significant effort which foster the integration and, more recently, inclusion of those children into mainstream classroom (Avramidis and Norwich, 2002). Studies have shown that, in the educational arena, attitudes and behaviors are closely interrelated and that attitudes could be powerful tool to predict behavior (Block and Obrusnikova, 2007). Importantly, the attitudes of head teachers of general education towards inclusion cannot be neglected. That is why, a number of studies have focused on the attitudes of the head teachers of general education towards sound implementation of inclusion (Hwang and Evans, 2011). That means head teachers’ attitudes have a significant important role to mainstream of children with ASD under inclusion (Guldberg, 2010; Humphrey and Lewis, 2008; Tutt, Powell and Thornton, 2006). These results encouraged the present researcher to investigate the head teachers’ attitudes of mainstreaming the children with ASD under inclusion in Bangladesh.

Attitudes of Head Teachers in Government Primary Schools towards the Inclusion of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder in Mainstream Education in Bangladesh

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This current research study investigates Government primary schools head teachers' attitudes towards inclusion of children with ASD in mainstream education in Bangladesh. The current study used a mixed method approach as the research methodology involving the use of a questionnaire with both closed-ended and open-ended questions as an instrument for data collection. This was used in order to gain insight into the attitudes under investigation. The mixed method design was of a fixed type whereby the use of both quantitative and qualitative approach. A mixed method approach has been employed in this research using purposively stratified random sampling in a sequential research design in which both qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis process was undertaken. Firstly, the attitudes of the head teachers toward mainstreaming the children with ASD were measured using a Likert Scale within the pre-designed questionnaire. This part was related with the qualitative study. Secondly, quantitative data was gathered in order to expand the scope of the study. This study initially aimed to inquire about head teachers' present understandings regarding mainstreaming the children with ASD under inclusive education through qualitative approach. Finally, in order to further capture head teachers' understanding, knowledge and meaning making around autism, written responses to some questions were also required. In this way, it was hoped a comprehensive understanding of the head teachers' attitudes regarding inclusion of children with ASD would be outlined. In this study, one of the major theoretical issues was how attitudes were to be defined. For the purpose of this current study, I decided to adopt the three component model of attitudes (Eagly and Chaiken, 1993). This model satisfies the idea that an attitude is a combination of three conceptually differentiable reactions to a certain object (in my case the object is inclusion) (Rosenberg and Havland, 1960). This three component model measures reactions with affective, cognitive and conative components (Avramidis, Byliss and Burden, 2000). In this research, Likert scales are used to measure beliefs relative to inclusion (cognitive component) and intentions (conative component). In Bangladesh, the primary education systems are managed within six tiers, with primary school being in the bottom tier. The head teacher of a government primary school is the administrative as well as

academic head of the institution, so head teachers play a vital role achieving government commitments. This is why in this research study, head teachers were identified as the participants in the study. Data were collected from 68 head teachers of Government primary schools. A purposively stratified random sampling method was chosen for collecting data as it is extensively used to subjectively measure social phenomena and investigate peoples' beliefs, attitudes, interest, practices and behavioral response trends to fixed issues under inquiry, with a view to generalize the results for the whole population. This method was considered, moreover, as suitable for use with a large number of participants who are scattered in different geographical locations. After collecting all filled up questionnaire from the respondents, the data were inputted in to the statistical software by coding for analysis. A widely used and powerful statistical software SPSS 22.0 and Microsoft Excel-2010 program has been use to analysis the data. After inputting all the data into the described software, demographic findings have been presented by tables and graphs. On the other hand the qualitative parts have been coding into segments where close-ended questions regarding knowledge on ASD were inputted based on three types that were yes, no and don't know. And other 6-point Likert scale questions were coding 1 to 6 based on the strongly agree to strongly disagree. Again the findings from open-ended questions were synchronized within some common characteristics and then those were tabulated based on their segments and have been shown both the tabulated and graphical form including cross tabulation form. And both the knowledge based and attitudinal qualitative findings also have been presented by both tabulated from and graphical representation. To find more significant findings or relationship among the variables some important appropriate statistical tests like dependency test, Chi-square test and Kendall tau-be test have been performed. Moreover, by analyzing the demographic data and close-ended questions as well as findings from the qualitative open-ended questions the researcher's aim was to seek the answer of the research questions of the present study.

RESULT

To identify the existing knowledge on ASD and regarding mainstreaming the children with ASD, the respondents were asked from where or how they have

Attitudes of Head Teachers in Government Primary Schools towards the Inclusion of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder in Mainstream Education in Bangladesh

heard the term ASD. Figure 1 shows those findings. It was found against the question that most of the head teachers, that was about 93%, heard the term ASD

from the government teacher training on Inclusive Education (IE). A very small number of them answered that they were informed from any other sources.

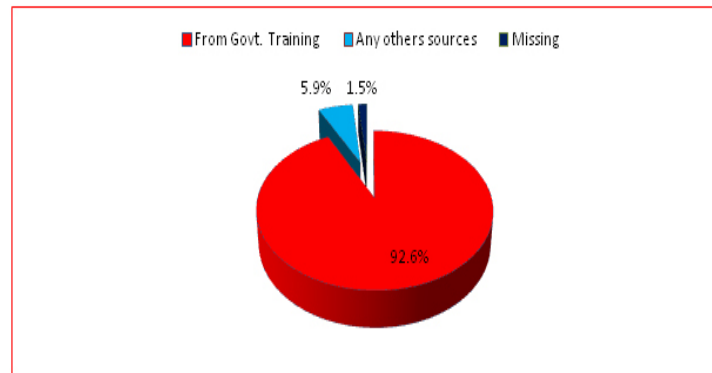


Fig1. Graphical Representations of the Sources of Hearing the Term Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

The head teachers were asked about the procedures of identifying or screening the children with ASD. Regarding this issue, the Figure 2 represents the findings. From the table and figure it was shown that 54.4% respondents answered that they identified the children with ASD by using the existing screening tools supplied from Inclusive Education Cell, Directorate of Primary Education (DPE). Here it should be mentioned that in 2010 Inclusive Education Cell of DPE developed a screening tools to identify the children with ASD

which was incorporated in the IE Training Manual. Only 10.3% respondents answered that they identified with the help of Doctors. It is very interesting that 19.1% respondents answered that the children with ASD enrolled their schools identified any other ways. In the open ended part of the questionnaire, the respondents told that they meant by any other ways, actually their parents or some person told them about his autism.

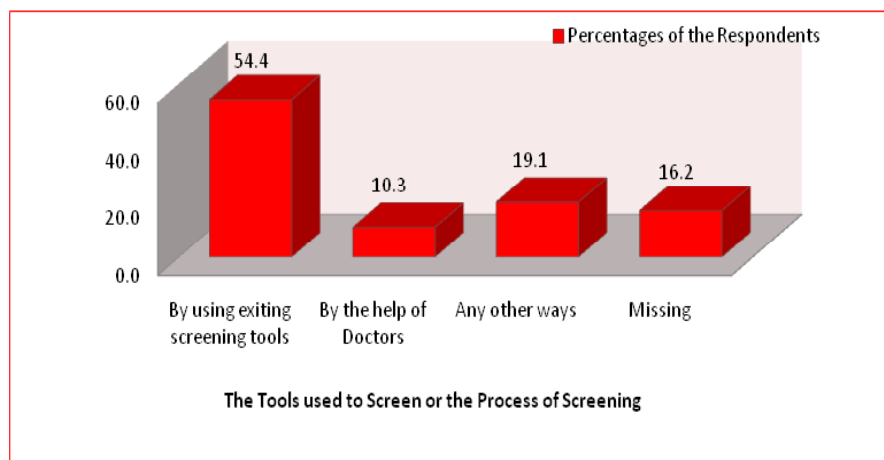


Fig2. Graphical Representation of the Screening Process of the Children with ASD in School Level

On the questions about training experiences of the respondents regarding Inclusive Education (IE) and children with ASD this study found that the respondents had very insufficient training on IE and ASD. The table 1 shows those results with a clear scenario which represents the three dimensional findings. It was found that 79.41% respondents had only five days training on IE and out of them there were

55.88% respondents who had no past experiences on teaching of the children with ASD that mean they were teaching the children with ASD first time. What is surprising is that only 10.29% respondents had the past experiences on teaching of children with ASD. More interesting finding was that no respondent was found who had experience on special education or ASD or children with disability.

Attitudes of Head Teachers in Government Primary Schools towards the Inclusion of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder in Mainstream Education in Bangladesh

Table1. Training Experiences of the Respondents regarding IE and Children with ASD

No. of Days Training on IE	Have any Training on IE?	Experience on Teaching of Children with ASD						Total	
		I had past experiences	Percentages	I taught children with ASD in the past	Percentages	This is the 1st time	Percentages	Number	Percentages
0	No	1	1.47%	0	0.00%	1	1.47%	2	2.94%
	Total	1	1.47%	0	0.00%	1	1.47%	2	2.94%
5	Yes	6	8.82%	10	14.71%	38	55.88%	54	79.41%
	Total	6	8.82%	10	14.71%	38	55.88%	54	79.41%
6	Yes	0	0.00%	1	1.47%	1	1.47%	2	2.94%
	Total	0	0.00%	1	1.47%	1	1.47%	2	2.94%
Total	Yes	6	8.82%	11	16.18%	39	57.35%	56	82.35%
	No	1	1.47%	0	0.00%	1	1.47%	2	2.94%
	Missing	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	10	14.71%
	Total	7	10.29%	11	16.18%	40	58.82%	68	100.00%

More than 94% respondents answered positively towards developmental disorder. A small portion that was 2.93%, negatively answered. Again 48.53% respondents said that autism is a psychological disorder but 27.94% answered against that statement. Surprisingly, 22.06% respondents had no idea about the causes of ASD but they are involved in learning and teaching process of the children with ASD. From the open-ended questions, majority of the head teachers in this study expressed their understanding regarding ASD with mixed experiences where more or less correctly same as the close-ended questions except a few of exceptional comments. Regarding the most common characteristics of ASD, 23.53% said that ASD is a physical developmental disorder which is alarming and 35.29% of the respondents answered towards neuro-developmental disorder. And only 1.47% answered that ASD is psychological disorder where as in close-ended section that was different. But 2.94% respondents believe that autism is a mental problem. Again from close-ended section, 67.65% respondents answered positively regarding delayed speech and language development of the children with ASD and in open-ended section there was no comment on this issue. The most important clinically relevant findings from close-ended section were that 76.47% respondents believed that the disorder autism is curable if it is diagnosed at early age which is surprising. As well as from open-ended part 10.29%

respondents believed that by taking special care it could be reduced. About 24% respondents believed that autism is the causes of poor paternal skills whereas 64.71% respondents answered negatively and 10.29% didn't know regarding the issue. In close-ended part, another clinically related finding was that 89.71% respondents denied the statement towards autism is a contamination disease but only 1.47% agreed with the statement and 5.88% respondents didn't know. As well as in open-ended part 2.94% respondents believe that ASD is not contamination. It is remarkable that though a very little portion agreed, it was surprising. Findings regarding socialization of the children with ASD in close-ended part, 69.12% respondents believed that the children with ASD were normally unable to social attachment with others, 22.06% did not believe the theme and only 5.88% had ignorance about that issue. On the other hand in open-ended part, 57.35% respondents said that children with ASD have repetitive behaviour; 48.53% believed that they are self-cantered within their surroundings. Again 30.88% respondents answered that they didn't response by calling with their name. Also in this section, some other characteristics of children with ASD had been stated that children with ASD normally are very sensitive and follow their own routine. Respondents' opinions on the teaching-learning abilities of the children with ASD were very positive in the close-ended part. The majority of head teachers

Attitudes of Head Teachers in Government Primary Schools towards the Inclusion of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder in Mainstream Education in Bangladesh

participating in this study believed that children with ASD always needed special procedures in learning-teaching process due to their slow learning abilities. Most of the participants answered that children with ASD can learn better with visualization method than auditory and sometimes they are more talented in some special areas of learning and knowledge. By analysing the data it has been found that 92.65% participants

said that special procedures needed in learning and teaching process and 91.18% knew that children with ASD are more able to learn by visualization than auditory. Also 83.82% believed regarding their talented. But the remarkable finding was that 55.88% head teachers believed that the children with ASD are unable to study in higher education which was misconception.

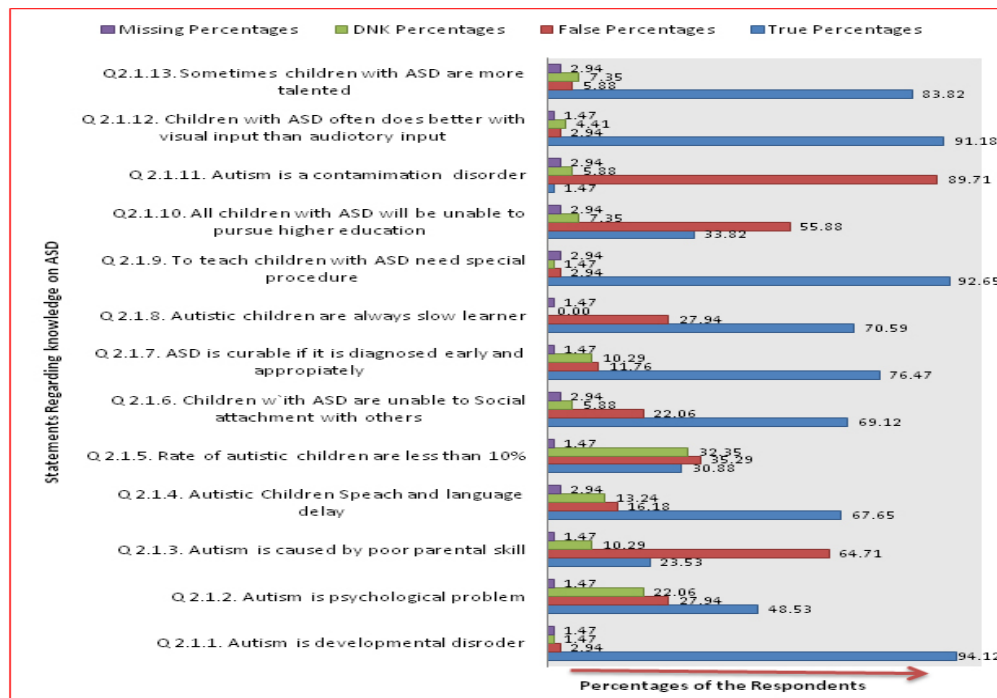


Fig3. Graphical Representation of the Statements Regarding Existing Knowledge on ASD of the Respondents from close-ended part

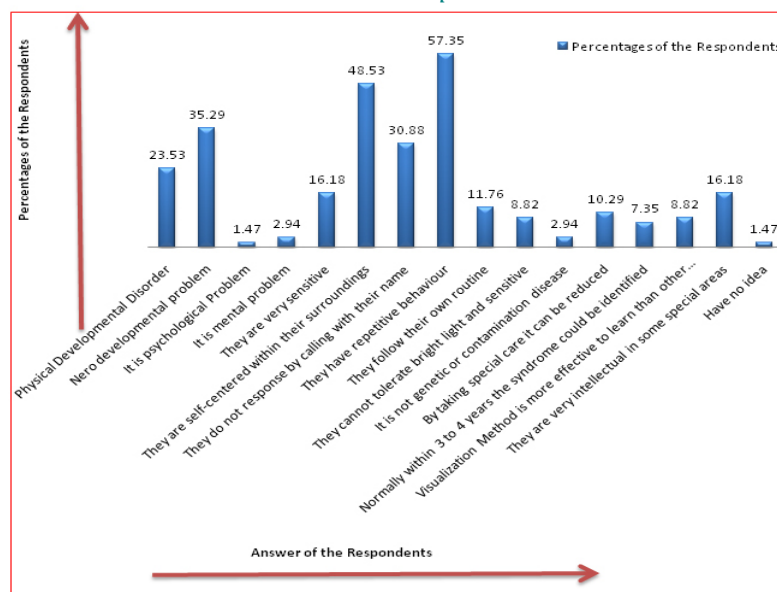


Fig4. Graphical Representation of Understanding of the Head teachers about ASD from open-ended part

Attitudes of Head Teachers in Government Primary Schools towards the Inclusion of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder in Mainstream Education in Bangladesh

It was desired from the respondents to know existing notion regarding main problems of children with ASD to mainstream. About 41% respondents answered that the children with ASD are normally self-centred within their surroundings and more than 38% said that those children did not response by calling with their name. Again about 24% answered regarding their misbehaviours for changing their routine, more than 16.18% said that those children are unable to regular life leading, about 21% identified their silence as a problem and also 21% answered that those children have no eye contact. Besides those, some of

the respondents answered regarding their sensitivity, inability to pay attention except their own thinking, addiction towards any specific things or objects, inability to follow the teachers' instructions. One respondent said that children with ASD are normally died at an early age which is remarkable. In this section it is alarming that very common characteristics of children with ASD had been identified which were treated as the problems to the respondents. Findings regarding this issue have been presented by the figure 5 given below.

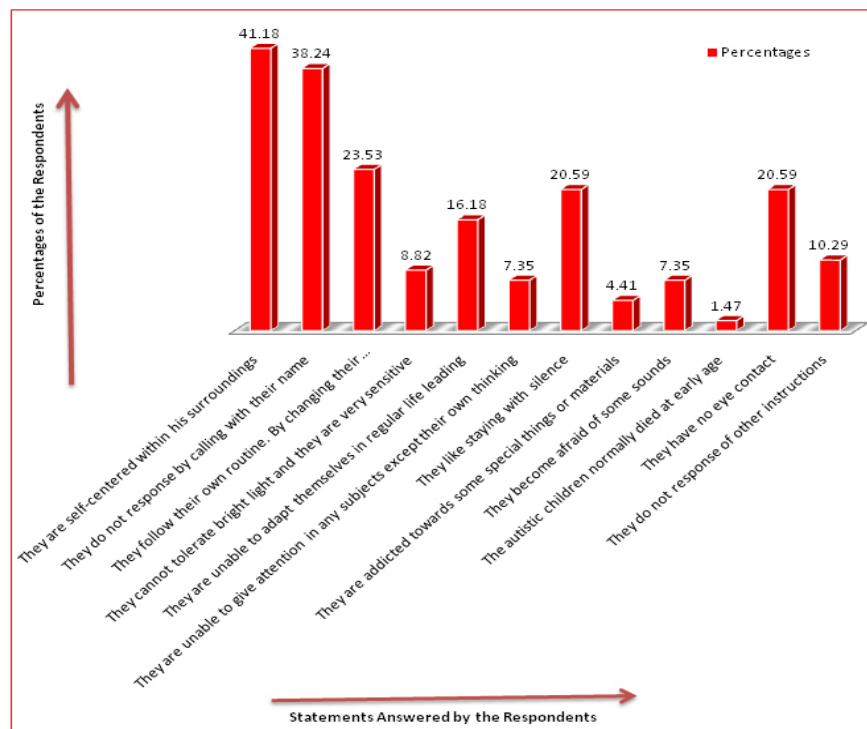


Fig5. Graphical Representation of the Main Problems Answered by the Respondents

The majority of the respondents felt positively towards the questions. It was found that 38.24% respondents agreed and 35.29% strongly agreed positively to integrate children with ASD in mainstream schools but more than 16% respondents strongly disagreed, disagreed and moderately disagreed with the statement. Again 45.59% respondents agreed that teaching of children with ASD in mainstream class could be possible if teachers would be cordial and about 36% strongly and moderately felt same thing regarding the issue. Also more than 55% respondents strongly and normally agreed that teachers are willing to teach children with ASD in regular classroom. Moreover, majority of the respondents were highly

positive to mainstream children with ASD irrespective of their severity. That means about 80% of the respondents had positive attitudes towards IE and children with ASD. A little portion (17%) disagreed with the issue. On the other hand, about 90% respondents reported that every school should have special teachers and physiotherapist to mainstream children with ASD smoothly. The most interesting finding was that respondents had divided opinions as to whether children with ASD should or should not be taught in special schools. Regarding the issue almost same portion had positive and negative opinion in each case. Graph 6 represents the findings regarding the issues.

Attitudes of Head Teachers in Government Primary Schools towards the Inclusion of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder in Mainstream Education in Bangladesh

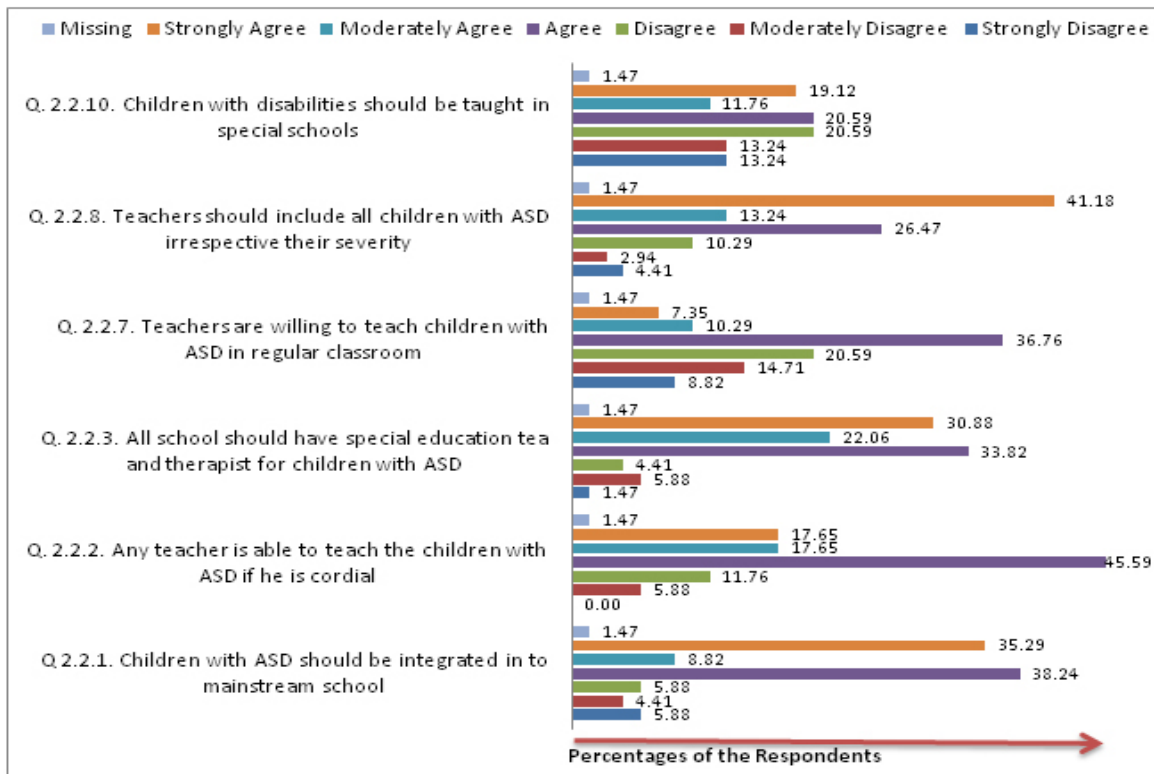


Fig6. Graphical representation of Understanding Regarding Inclusive Education and Attitudes towards Mainstreaming of Children with ASD

Participants in this study overwhelmingly conformed their understanding on IE and relation between IE and children with ASD. In this section 85.29% respondents positively answered the definition of IE which was informed in their training on IE. It seems to me that at least the respondents have good understanding about IE either they were able to implement or not. Similar attitudes were noticed regarding relation between IE and mainstreaming of children with ASD. About 80% answered that mainstreaming of children with ASD is the part of inclusion. But it was alarming that 17.65% respondents had no idea regarding the issue. Again

respondents were asked about their ideas on national and international laws and legislations by which they could realize the importance or obligations of IE and mainstreaming them. It was found an average satisfactory answer from the respondents. It was observed that 45.59% respondents had a partial idea, 26.47% answered 'don't know', 19.12% said they had no clear concept about the matter and only 8.82% respondents had average clear concept regarding the issue. Figures 7, 8 and 9 show the findings regarding the issues which are given below.

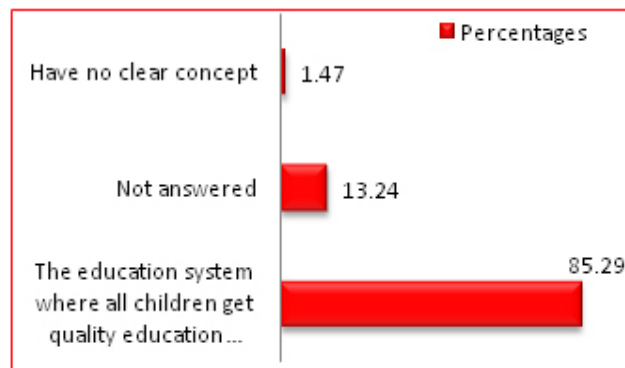


Fig7. Understanding of the respondents about Inclusive Education

Attitudes of Head Teachers in Government Primary Schools towards the Inclusion of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder in Mainstream Education in Bangladesh

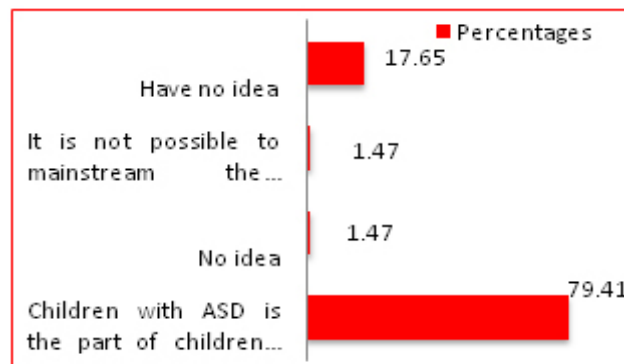


Fig8. Understanding of the respondents that how ASD is related to Inclusive Education

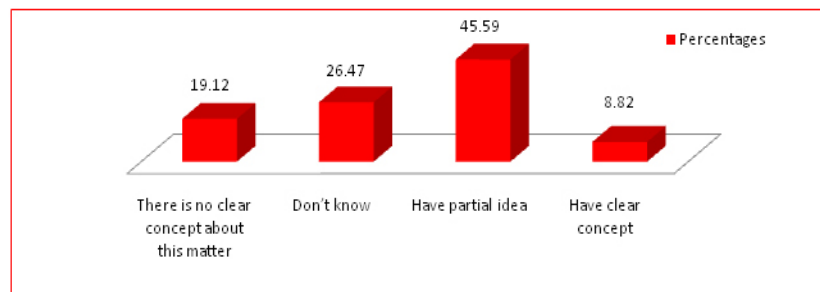


Fig9. Knowledge about National and International Laws Legislations

DISCUSSION

Based on key findings of the current research regarding the attitudes of the head teachers towards mainstreaming of children with ASD under inclusion was critically discussed here. The aim of the study was to explore the opportunities and barriers as seen by head teachers regarding the inclusion of children with ASD, and their ability to achieve government goals of ensuring quality in primary education for all children. To find the present understanding and to examine the attitudes of the head teachers regarding mainstream of children with ASD some demographical variables as well as some qualitative variables like educational qualification, length of teaching experiences, training regarding ASD, number of teachers, number of children with ASD enrolled and theoretical knowledge on ASD have been considered. This results are consistent with those observed in earlier researches done by those researchers in related field who are Avramidis and Norwich, (2002), De Boer, Pill and Minnaert, (2011), Glazzard, (2011) and Bradshaw and Mundia, (2006) interestingly described those types of variables which seemed as influencing factors of teachers attitudes to mainstream children with disabilities under inclusion.

Regarding highest educational qualification, maximum of the participants were graduates and above that implies that head teachers were generally educationally qualified none of them was expert in Special Education Need (SEN) which is contrary of that of Hristovskaa & Jovanova (2010) who mentioned the importance of professionalism in SEN to implement success inclusive education. In this study it has been found that educational qualifications is significantly associated with general knowledge on ASD that mean head teachers with higher educational qualifications were more positive towards inclusion than those of less educational qualifications. Liu et al. (2016) also supported such an interpretation that level of education had highly significant effect on knowledge of ASD. So based on this comment in Bangladesh, highly educated and experienced with SEN Head teachers are essential for smooth implementation of IE. In case of length of teaching experiences it was found that more than 90% respondents were teaching experienced with 10 to 30 years which is sufficient regarding research evidence and the analysis has been indicated a significant positive association between teaching experiences and conceptual knowledge regarding ASD which satisfy the findings of the study

Attitudes of Head Teachers in Government Primary Schools towards the Inclusion of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder in Mainstream Education in Bangladesh

done by Azam (2015). He stated that teaching experience was significantly associated with attitudes towards inclusion that mean more experienced teacher were more positive for mainstreaming of children with disabilities. These results also are consistent with those of Avramidis and Norwich (2002) who found that overall teachers with much experience with disabled children had significantly more positive attitudes towards integration than those with little or no experience. However the findings of the current study do not support the previous research done by Sharma and Chow (2008) found that primary schools Head teachers with less teaching experiences were more positive regarding inclusion than those with more teaching experiences. The researchers justified their finding by explaining that head teachers with less experience were current graduates, and they might be informed about various recent strategies of teaching methods for children with disabilities through training than those with more experience. But most of the researchers mentioned above supported the result of this current study. Majority of Head teachers (93%) having only five days training on inclusive education and more specifically within this five days training only one day was regarding ASD which was very insufficient. But like many other researchers Santoli and other colleagues (2008) and Avramidis and Nowich (2002) emphasized on adequate training in SEN which is absolutely absent in the present study. Again 93% participants reported that they had heard the term 'ASD' first time from those five days government training and surprisingly it was found that more than 50% respondents replied that they identified the children with ASD by using existing screening tools tagged with the five days training manual of IE without any education psychologist or experts whereas none of those head teachers had expertise on SEN which is concerning. It is important that in spite of having a very short training most of the participant were verbally knowledgeable about ASD. Moreover, despite have a number of enrolling children with ASD, no support teacher was present to engage in learning process those children with ASD in the classroom that was mentioned by the participants which also contradict with the successful

implementation of inclusion derived by experts above. Avramidis and Norwich, (2002) and Kaulina et al., (2016) clearly illustrated very important evidences regarding theoretical knowledge and general concept on ASD which is essentially important and need as a much influential factors of head teachers' attitudes towards inclusion of children with ASD. They considered specific theoretical knowledge and skills on ASD as the most important factors in improving head teachers' attitudes towards implementation of inclusive education. In the present study, participants were asked about their present knowledge on ASD which were associated with causes of ASD in biological or clinical aspects, socialization abilities and learning abilities through thirteen close-ended and three open-ended questions. The interesting findings were that majority of the participants replied correctly regarding the causes of autism. They answered about ASD as developmental disorder, neuro-developmental disorder, psychological problem, mental disorder, incomplete development of brain or chromosomal disorder and genetically disorder which satisfy the expertise findings described in earlier chapter. Also they mentioned some definite characteristics of children with ASD like existing of repetitive behavior, absence of eye contact, unable to cooped themselves with other i.e., absence of socialization power, follow a fixed routine and some others. Here it should be mentioned that different expertise on ASD describe like that. For example in Autism Wikipedia ASD is defined as a neurodevelopmental difficulties which is characterized by impaired social interaction, verbal and non-verbal communication, and restricted and repetitive behavior (Landa, R.J., 2008). More recently Autism defined as autism spectrum disorder is known as a severe pervasive neurodevelopmental disorder with poor prognosis. This disorder is characterized by difficulties in social interaction, verbal and nonverbal communication and repetitive behaviors, and is more prevalent in males (Le-Couteur and Szatmari, 2015). On the other hand about 75% respondents believed that autism is curable if it is diagnosed at an early age which is matter of concern. Again some of the participants responded as autism is a hereditary problem and some of those replied autism as a

Attitudes of Head Teachers in Government Primary Schools towards the Inclusion of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder in Mainstream Education in Bangladesh

contamination disease which is completely misconception and alarming. Some other conceptions like early marriage, pregnancy at an early age, malnutrition and mental stress of mother at pregnancy period, drug reaction during pregnancy, injury at the time of delivery, laziness of mother, iodine or vitamin deficiency and lack of awareness of parents also have been identified as the causes of ASD. Though the percentage was not so high, it seems to me that nationally the percentage of barring these conceptions is not negligible. The causes of such ideas may be the ignorance due to insufficient training and lack of resources which have been illustrated in the next section based on the findings. Understanding regarding Inclusive Education (IE) and attitudes towards mainstreaming of children with ASD were very much positive among the respondents. Most of the participants had a common understanding about IE that every student should be included in the regular classroom and should achieve quality education without any discrimination in learning process at any cost. Moreover in this study majority of the head teachers were highly positive to mainstream of children with ASD irrespective the level of severity which implies very positive attitudes towards IE and children with ASD. Most of the head teachers mentioned to smooth implementation of mainstreaming of children with ASD, school should have special trained teachers physiotherapist or psychotherapist which is valid notion regarding IE and it also satisfies with findings of many other researchers like Vaz el al., (2015) and Rodriguez, Saldana, and Moreno, (2012) who rightly mentioned that teacher training also has a powerful influence on the development of attitudes toward inclusion, especially when it incorporates related and specific professional abilities. Again in response of the statements 'children with ASD could be possible to include mainstream classroom' and 'teachers were willing to include children with ASD in regular classroom' more than 80% of the respondents replied that it is possible if the teachers would be cordial and committed to include those children in their classroom. Avramidis and Norwich, (2002) very clearly alluded that in support of this characteristics of the teacher's personality factors like impact upon teacher's

acceptance of the inclusion principle has a significant impact on attitudes towards inclusion. Moreover majority of the head teachers stated that 'the education system where all children get quality education with equity and equally is the inclusion and that why children with ASD is the part of inclusion.' But majority of the participants did not know why all children should be included that means they have very little ideas about national and international legislations and commitment. Due to lack of proper training and support from government authority may be the causes of such ignorance. On the other hand it was found that a small portion of the head teachers had partial ideas and had no idea about IE. So this finding implies that the participants heard at least the general concept of IE and they are more positive to mainstream children with ASD irrespective their severity under implementation of IE. This outcome is contrary a little bit to that of Azam (2015) who found that most of the school administrators were unwilling to mainstream the children with severe disabilities. Also he found that schools administrators were negative regarding inclusion of children with disabilities because they did not believe that "teachers were skilled" enough to teach students with disabilities. But cause of positive findings in the present study or causes of changing these results may be over the time due to increasing facilities under government activities and extension of different Medias, general concept of IE is increasing among the stakeholders. The results of this study and recommendations need to be understood in light of some unavoidable limitations. The first limitation of this study was the sample size. There are about 65000 government primary schools' head teachers in Bangladesh but in this study the sample size was only 73, with 5 respondents missing. So such a sample size precludes generalization of the findings from the present study across the educational system in Bangladesh. Secondly, time constraint was another limitation. For data collection the researcher was permitted only four weeks from the University authority. But the participants of this study were in eight geographical locations in Bangladesh. So due to different distance the researcher was unable to visit the participants. Lastly, the questionnaire applied to

Attitudes of Head Teachers in Government Primary Schools towards the Inclusion of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder in Mainstream Education in Bangladesh

collect data was a self-report survey, which may produce distinct explanations of the same question by different participants. This limitation might be relevant, especially in relation to understanding the term 'ASD' and 'inclusive education'. This could lead to the misinterpretation of the finding at the time of data analysis. In spite of having those limitations discussed above, the exploration made by this study has offered future directions for investigating many other areas relating to mainstreaming of children with ASD within an inclusion agenda.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion of the current study revealed that most of the government primary schools' head teachers in Bangladesh have significant theoretical knowledge, average understanding and practices regarding ASD which have influenced to bear positive attitudes towards mainstreaming of children with ASD. Moreover, regular head teachers in this present study hold a positive view towards being responsible for the education of children with ASD. Variable such as highest level of educational qualification, teaching experience, number of teachers, number of enrolled general students and pupils with ASD, teachers training both professional and inclusive education, parents, community and SMC participation and different supports had significant impact on head teachers' attitudes towards mainstreaming of children with ASD under inclusive education. Other factors such as lack of training, shortage of resources, lack of collaboration with parents, community and SMC and motivational activities among all stakeholders including teachers can have a negative influence on effective inclusive practice, regardless of any willingness or positive attitude expressed by head teachers.

REFERENCES

- [1] Ahsan, M. T., Sharma, U., Deppeler, J.M. (2011) Beliefs of pre-service teacher education institutional heads about inclusive education in Bangladesh. *Bangladesh Education Journal*, 10(1): 9-29.
- [2] Avramidis, E. and Norwich, B. (2002) Teachers' attitudes towards integration/inclusion: a review of the literature. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*. 17(2):129-147. DOI: 10.1080/08856250210129056 To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/08856250210129056>.
- [3] Avramidis, E., Bayliss, P. and Burder, R. (2000) Student teachers' attitudes towards the inclusion of children with special educational needs in the ordinary school. *Teaching and Teacher Education*. 16 (3):277-293.
- [4] Annual Primary School Census Report 2016 (ASPR-2016) Directorate of Primary Education, Bangladesh. Available in URL: www.dpebd.gov
- [5] Azam, A. Q. M. Shafiul (2015) Administrators' Preparedness for Inclusive Education Reform in Bangladesh, Faculty of Education Monash University Victoria, Australia. URL: arrow.monash.edu.au
- [6] Block, M. E. and Obrusnikova, I. (2007) Inclusion in physical education: A review of the literature from 1995-2005. *Adapted Physical Activity Quarterly*, 24:103-124.
- [7] Bradshaw, L. and Mundia, L. (2006) Attitudes to and Concerns about Inclusive Education: Bruneian Inservice and Preservice Teachers. *International Journal of Special Education*, 21(1): 35-41.
- [8] CDC, (2016) Centres for Disease Control and Prevents, CDC 24/7: saving lives, protecting people. Available in URL: <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/65/ss/ss6503a1.htm>.
- [9] de Boer, A., Pill, S.J., Minnaert A. (2011) Regular Primary Schoolteachers' attitudes towards inclusive education: a review of the literature. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 15(3):331-353.
- [10] Eagly, A. H. and Chaiken, S. (1993) *The psychology of attitudes*. San Diego, CA and Fort Worth, TX: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
- [11] Guldberg, K. (2010) Educating children on the autism spectrum: Preconditions for inclusion and notions of best autism practice in the early years. *British Journal of Special Education*, 37(4): 168-174.

Attitudes of Head Teachers in Government Primary Schools towards the Inclusion of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder in Mainstream Education in Bangladesh

- [12] Glazzard, J., (2011) Perception of the barriers to effective inclusion in one primary school: voices of teachers and teaching assistants. *Support for Learning*, 26(2). pp. 56-63.
- [13] Humphrey, N. and Lewis, S. (2008) 'Make me normal': the views and experiences of pupils on the autistic spectrum in mainstream secondary school. *Autism: An International Journal of Research and Practice*, 12(1):23-47.
- [14] Hwang, Y.S. and Evans, D., (2011) Attitudes Towards Inclusion: gaps between belief and practice. *International Journal of Special Education*, 26(1): 136-146. Available in URL: <https://eprints.qut.edu.au/34074/>
- [15] Hristovskaa, D. and Jovanova, S. (2010) Practical strategies to improve learning and achievements of pupils with special educational needs in elementary school, *Procedia Social and Behavioral Sciences* 2 (2010) 2911–2916, Available online at www.sciencedirect.com
- [16] Kaulina, A., Voita, D., Trubina, I. and Voits, T. (2016) Children with Special Educational Needs and Their Inclusion in the Educational System: Pedagogical and Psychological Aspects. *Signum Temporis* 2016; 8(1):37-42.
- [17] Liu, Y., Li, J., Zheng, Q., Zaroff, C.M., Hall, B.J., Xiuhong L. X. and Hao, Y. (2016) Knowledge, attitudes, and perceptions of autism spectrum disorder in a stratified sampling of preschool teachers in China. *BMC Psychiatry*, 16:142 DOI 10.1186/s12888-016-0845-2.
- [18] Landa, R.J. (2008) "Diagnosis of autism spectrum disorders in the first 3 years of life". *Nat Clin Pract Neurol*, 4(3): 138–147. doi: 10.1038/ncpneu0731. PMID 18253102.
- [19] Le-Couteur, A., and Szatmari, P. (2015) Ch 51: 'Autism spectrum disorder'. In A.T.D.S. Pine, J.F. Leckman, S. Scott, M.J. Snowling, and E.A. Taylor (Eds.), *Rutter's child and adolescent psychiatry* (6th edn, pp. 665). Oxford, UK: Wiley-Blackwell.
- [20] Mullick, J. (2013) Leadership Practice and Inclusive Education Reform in Primary Schools in Bangladesh. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Faculty of Education, Monash University Melbourne, Australia.
- [21] Rosenberg, M.J. and Hovland, C.I. (1960) Cognitive, affective and behavioural components of attitudes, in C.I., HOVLAND & M.J., ROSENBERG (Eds). *Attitudes organization and change: an analysis of consistency among attitudes components*, 1-14. (New Haven), CT, Yale University Press.
- [22] Rodriguez, R.I., Saldana, D. and Moreno, J.F. (2012) Support Inclusion, and Special Education Teachers' Attitudes toward the Education of Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders. *Autism Research and Treatment*. Volume-2012, Hindawi Publishing Corporation 2012, Article ID 259468, 8 pages doi:10.1155/2012/259468.
- [23] Sharma, U. and Chow, E. (2008) The attitudes of Hong Kong primary school principals toward integrated education. *Asia Pacific Education Review*, 9(3):380-391.
- [24] Santoli, S.P., Sachs, J., Elizabeth A. Romey, E.A., McClurg S. (2008) A Successful Formula for Middle School Inclusion: Collaboration, Time, and Administrative Support. *RMLE Online*, 32:2, 1-13, DOI: 10.1080/19404476.2008.11462055
- [25] Tutt, T., Powell, S. and Thornton, M. (2006) Educational approaches in autism: what we know about what we do. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 22(1):69-81.
- [26] United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), (2008b). *Inclusive education: The way of the future*. Final report of the International Conference of Education (48th session). Paris: UNESCO.
- [27] United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (2004) *The right to education for person with disabilities: Towards inclusion*. Conceptual paper, December. ED/BAS/EIE/2004/1REV. Paris: UNESCO.
- [28] UNESCO. (2001) *The open file on inclusive education*. Paris, France: UNESCO). United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, (2000) *The Dakar framework for action*. Paris, UNESCO.

Attitudes of Head Teachers in Government Primary Schools towards the Inclusion of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder in Mainstream Education in Bangladesh

- [29] United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, (1994) Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education. United Nations Resolution Adopted by the World Conference on Special Needs Education: Access and Quality. Retrieved from URL: <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0009/000984/098427eo.pdf>.
- [30] United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. (1990) World Declaration on Education for All. Retrieved from URL: http://www.unesco.org/education/efa/ed_for_all/background/jomtien_declaration.shtml
- [31] Vaz, S., Wilson, N., Falkmer, M., Sim, A., Scott, M. and Cordier, R., (2015) Factors Associated with Primary School Teachers' Attitudes Towards the Inclusion of Students with Disabilities. PLoS ONE 10(8): e0137002. doi: 10.1371/journal.pone.0137002.

Citation: Md Muzibor Rahman, Carmel Conn. *Attitudes of Head Teachers in Government Primary Schools towards the Inclusion of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder in Mainstream Education in Bangladesh.* Archives of Community and Family Medicine. 2020; 3(1): 31-44.

Copyright: © 2020 Md Muzibor Rahman, Carmel Conn. This is an open access article distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.