

Editorial

Inclusive Education in developing countries: Anticipating louder voice based on the contextual research studies

M. Tariq Ahsan^a

^a *Institute of Education and Research (IER), University of Dhaka, Bangladesh*

Since the Salamanca Declaration (UNESCO, 1994) issues related to inclusive education have gained the status of a global agenda with a view to ensuring that schools are free from the effects of negative forms of discrimination based on gender, disability, culture, ethnicity, religion or differences arising from students' socio-economic and or geographic backgrounds. Since then both developed and developing countries have undertaken a wide variety of reform initiatives to reduce all forms of inequalities in education. While there is a wide body of research related to inclusive education conducted in western countries, very few studies have been conducted in the developing country context. It has to be remembered that there is a huge socio-demographic difference in Asian countries with the contexts of the West.

Taking these issues together in consideration, the editorial board members of the *Asian Journal of Inclusive Education (AJIE)* decided to offer a regional and international platform to conduct a multidisciplinary strategic dialogue on inclusive education for educationists, teachers, policy makers, researchers and other interested professionals based on research studies conducted in developing countries within Asia and beyond. As a result of such commitment, we are delighted to announce that this first issue of the AJIE [Vol 1 No. 1, January 2013, ISSN 2304-1188 (Print)] is now available in both published and online format.

From the very beginning, the AJIE has been very serious in maintaining its quality of the peer-review process. Hence, a high rejection rate was observed despite receiving 13 articles for review from different parts of the world that included papers of authors from Bangladesh, India, Australia, Spain, Ghana, and Botswana. The editorial board and the international review panel of the AJIE followed a rigorous double-blind peer review process for selecting articles for publication in this journal. Finally, three articles and one book-review were accepted for publication in this first volume of the AJIE.

As a result of pro-inclusive changes in education sectors, classrooms are welcoming diverse learners who were previously segregated. This situation is creating more challenges for educators to meet every child's learning needs. Extensive research literature has confirmed that teacher quality is the single most important variable for influencing student achievements. Teachers are, therefore, critical to successful implementation of inclusive education. Despite having substantial reforms in education systems in different parts of the world, it is still reported that some teachers feel uncomfortable in including children with special needs in their programs. Taking this issue in consideration, the first paper of Umesh Sharma, Chris Forlin, Joanne Deppeler and Yang Guangxue conducted reviews of research studies undertaken in the last five years in 13 Asia-Pacific countries, with aims of understanding challenges of inclusive education in this region and also how

well teacher education programs are responding to Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The authors of this paper identified several contextual challenges and make some specific recommendations.

In line with the concerns regarding including children with special needs in regular schools, the second paper by Utpal Mallick and Kazi Sameeo Sheesh explored this issue from the perspectives of students and parents in Bangladesh. Following a semi-structured interview schedule, this paper also identifies some key barriers to inclusion including a lack of awareness among teachers, students, and their parents regarding children with special needs and the teachers' lack in skills and experience regarding teaching children with special needs. Their paper suggests strategies to overcome these barriers.

There is a vast body of research studies, which indicates that for leaders and educators to implement change policies, they must first believe in the concept and be willing to implement change. Hence, inclusive reform initiatives have to start from the leadership positions for its acceptance to others. Furthermore, inclusive leadership is exemplary as it involves people through team work and encourages others to act as leaders promoting inclusive practices at the policy and organizational levels through reforming decision-making processes, initiating new ideas, involving and collaborating with other people and agencies beyond the institution (Ryan, 2006). Development of standardized tools regarding measurement of inclusive leadership practices in developing country context is in high demand. The third paper by Jahirul Mullick has described the development process of an inclusive leadership measurement scale the *Distributed Leadership Practice for Inclusive Education* in the Bangladesh context. This scale could similarly be a very useful tool for other developing countries to determine inclusive leadership practices among teachers.

The last section of this first volume of the AJIE includes a book review conducted by Dianne Chambers on the book *Future Directions for Inclusive Teacher Education: An International Perspective*, edited by Chris Forlin (2012). This review also highlights the contribution of this book in identifying issues related to inclusive education in both developed developing countries such as Malaysia, Thailand, China, Israel, Finland, Negara Brunei Darussalam, and the Unites States of America. This book review also meets the requirements of this journal objective very well.

On behalf of the editorial board of the AJIE, the editor would like to take the opportunity to thank the Inclusion Initiatives for Special-needs Bangladesh (IISB) for their foresight in publishing this important journal for the region. We trust that these papers will contribute in knowledge generation as well as promoting pro-inclusive changes in developing countries in Asia and beyond.

References

- Ryan, J. (2006). *Inclusive leadership*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
 UNESCO. (1994). *The Salamanca statement and framework for action on special need education*. Spain: UNESCO.