

# **Perspectives of students and parents about mainstreaming education for children with special needs in Bangladesh**

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This paper deals with the issue of mainstreaming children with special needs (CSN) into regular classrooms and discusses the problems from the viewpoint of the students and their parents' experiences. Following a qualitative method, this paper investigates the phenomenon of mainstream education for CSN. The context of this study was two regular primary schools in Dhaka, Bangladesh and participants were selected purposively from these schools. Semi-structured and open-ended questions were used for the interviews. The results of the study showed that there is a lack of awareness among mainstream teachers, general students and their parents about CSN. The parents reported that teachers lack the skills and experience for teaching CSN together with the regular students in the same class. They also stated that there is limited teacher training and that the resources in the schools are inadequate to meet the needs of their children. Inaccessible infrastructures and facilities in schools were mentioned as other important barriers for the education of CSN in mainstream schools. Students and parents, however, seemed to support the idea of mainstreaming.

**Keywords:** Mainstream Education; Bangladesh; Children with Special Needs; Teachers; Parents

## **Introduction**

Education is a fundamental human right and is seen as the key to having a better and more fulfilling life for survival, protection, and development of human potentialities (UNICEF, 2007). Education is increasingly considered as a key to the inclusive and sustained development of a society (UNESCO, 2012). Access to quality education irrespective of the race, religion or other traits, therefore, is the basic right of every citizen. However, the question that arises is one of what happens to those students who need special support to get this basic human right?

According to the EFA Global Monitoring Report (2010), children with disabilities remain one of the main groups being widely excluded from quality education. The EFA Global Monitoring Report (2007) estimated that the majority of children with disabilities did not go to school at all, and of the 72 million primary aged children worldwide that were out of school, one third had disabilities. In their report, Grönlund; Lim, and Larsson (2010) mentioned that Bangladesh has some 150 million inhabitants, half of which are under 20 years of age. The number of people with disabilities is not clear as no complete survey has been done. However, if the percentage is assumed to be approximately 10 % by international assessment, there should be approximately 15 million people with disabilities in Bangladesh. An earlier study by Ackerman, Thormann, and Huq (2005) estimated that the total number of children with disabilities, ages birth to ten was 3,153,886, or 7.7% of the population of that age.

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Recent studies in Bangladesh continue to suggest that the vast majority of children with disabilities never attended schools and that a large percentage of the ones who do attend mainstream schools soon drop out due to inaccessible school infrastructure, and unfriendly school environment (CSID, 2002) and non-inclusive teaching practices (Ahsan and Burnip, 2007). According to Hossain (2007), the launching of the second Bangladesh sector-wide program Primary Education Development Program (PEDP-II) in 2004 marked a significant scaling up of the government's commitment to 'Education for All' goals and for the first time recognized mainstreaming children with special needs (CSN) policy under this project.

Though there are special programs like PEDP-II and currently PEDP-III in place to promote full participation of CSN into mainstream education, barriers stand in the way to meet their needs. Lewis (2007b) reported that several developing countries have put great effort into expanding school enrolment. But although improving enrolment rates is a key step to getting all children into school, delivering universal primary education means more than providing schools or getting more children to enroll. For instance, Lewis mentioned, in Bangladesh there has been large-scale investment in improving access to education, yet there has been little focus on whether schools are inclusive and good enough to retain and be of any real benefit to children after enrolment.

To present examples of inclusive education in Bangladesh, UNICEF (2003) suggested that although school enrolment is increasing at a fast rate, the enrolment of CSN is extremely low. They are often marginalized in mainstream schools as a result of negative attitudes towards them. A lack of child-centered approaches in education and the physical inaccessibility of schools are other reasons for low enrolment. Consequently, a large percentage of those who do attend mainstream schools soon drop out.

Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD)'s recent experience from Nepal, Tanzania, Vietnam and Zambia shows that few countries have developed the necessary mechanisms to ensure presence, participation, and achievement of all learners in education (Lewis, 2007b). The specific nature and scope of these barriers for Bangladeshi CSN, however, is not fully known, and ways to address these barriers deserve investigation.

The Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics (BANBEIS) undertook a study in 2008 on the "Inclusive Secondary Education Environment for the Children with Special Needs." Their study focused on the existing physical environment regarding inclusive education for CSN. They employed a desk research approach, reviewing and analyzing documents, papers, articles, research reports etcetera related to education for CSN. They also collected experts' opinions regarding the issue. This BANBEIS study, though, focused only on physical and structural barriers for secondary school students. More information about primary school students with special needs is needed, about the broad range of challenges (not just physical) that they face, and information needs to be directly gathered from students, parents and teachers. Findings from research on this topic may be useful in enhancing the practices of supporting CSN and serve as an advocacy tool for promoting their mainstreaming education.

### ***Background of mainstreaming for children with special needs***

Historically, children with disabilities have been referred to as having 'special needs' (Porter, 2005). In recent years there has been a growing, international trend to avoid categorizing people according to their disabilities or difficulties. A more acceptable term is a child with 'special needs' in order to emphasize that the child is first and special need or disability second (BANBEIS, 2008). Janus, Lefort, Cameron, and Kopechanski (2007) defined the term 'special needs' as needs that are

different from those of typical children. Olivier and Williams (2005) said 'special needs' exist where learners require special help and support if they are to overcome the particular contextual, social, and individual disadvantages they face. Therefore, they require the provision of different or additional resources. According to Lewis (2007a), in many ways, 'children with special needs' is an inappropriate way of defining a distinct group of children, because we could say that all children have special or individual educational needs (e.g. because they struggle in a particular subject, are particularly gifted, find it hard to socialize, etc). A child does not have to have a specific impairment or other diagnosed physical or intellectual problem to have a special educational need. CSN, however, is used throughout this report to mean children with disabilities.

Like the definition of CSN, there are wide range of opinions amongst parents, educators and related professionals about appropriate schooling for CSN. In a Bangladeshi study by Mullick, Deppeler, and Sharma (2012), school leaders perceived that some parents of CSN believed that their children would not be successful in life, would eventually become burdens for them, and did not have high expectations for them in school. Rahaman and Sutherland (2012) mentioned that, there may be a high degree of resistance from educators towards education for CSN in Bangladesh. This may be due to perceptions and myths surrounding disabilities and also observed behavioral difficulties. However, advocates of special education argue that placing CSN among normal children will lower their self-esteem and confidence. They may be stigmatized, teased and looked down by their non-disabled peers and teachers. They will need additional and specialized support to help them adapt to and learn in schools. Advocates of inclusive education believe that children have the right to be educated in mainstream/regular schools with their non-disabled peers (UNICEF, 2003).

The Salamanca Declaration (1994) emphasizes that the regular classroom is the best place to safeguard the right of education for CSN. The process of including CSN in mainstream classes as a way of addressing and responding to individual learning needs has been accepted as the preferred method for providing education for the majority of them (UNICEF, 2005). There is a growing consensus among professionals and disability rights organizations in Bangladesh that inclusion in the mainstream schooling system is the only way to provide a means for education and learning for all children. A major emphasis has been given towards inclusion of CSN into mainstream education in the PEDP II (CSID, 2002). Sultana (2010) also reported that the education system for CSN is gradually shifting towards from segregated to mainstream education system. This idea has been promoted worldwide to ensure that all learners belong to a school community (Avramidis, Bayliss, and Burden, 2000).

According to Nevins and Garber (2006), mainstreaming CSN is a complex endeavor that requires careful consideration of a number of factors, such as child readiness factors, school readiness factors, and parental readiness factors, each of which contributes to its success. Sharma, (2011) argues that mainstreaming of CSN in regular school is always desired but never fully achieved. This is true in both developed and developing countries. A majority of the developing countries has made significant improvements in mandating inclusion of all children through policies or legislation, but implementation of such policies or legislation at classroom level has not been achieved and remains a distant reality.

There are many reasons for slow progress or no progress in this regard. According to Rahaman and Sutherland (2012), the role of schools in the inclusion of CSN into regular classrooms remains unclear. Policymakers are still in favor of creating awareness for social inclusion. Their stance comprises only enrolling them into mainstream schools, and does not emphasize the quality of the process. Several teacher educators constructed an argument against inclusion. According to these teachers, special education is still the best option for CSN and most of the regular schools are

not ready to include them due to inappropriate infrastructure, teaching-learning strategies, and an inaccessible curriculum. UNICEF, (2003) described that the traditional methods of teaching and learning, little scope for addressing diverse learning needs of students, lack of continuous assessment of individual learners, and a serious shortage of assistive devices and learning materials all act as major barriers to CSN in Bangladesh. Teachers lack training and experience in teaching and handling them.

More importantly, according to Rahaman and Sutherland (2011), it is perhaps true that the teachers of Bangladesh are not able to identify the real needs of their pupils. Ahsan, Sharma, and Deppeler (2011) suggested that there are deficiencies in provisions and facilities in schools that undermined the general principles of individualized and learner centered teaching learning. UNESCO (2012) also reported that in many countries CSN still go through uncomfortable, negative and/or discouraging experiences at school, e.g. discrimination, prejudice, bullying, violence resulting exclusions from schools. The re-orientation of education systems towards more inclusive and just societies, therefore, requires addressing exclusion. Finding out when exclusion may be occurring is important because it would help a country to focus its interventions on addressing those specific moments of exclusion.

This paper contributes to new insights about mainstreaming CSN, from the point of view of those who actually experience it: CSN and their parents. Their perspective provides information about factors that are hindering children's participation in regular schools.

### **Research Question and Methodology**

The specific research question driving this study is: From the perspective of students with special needs and their parents in Bangladesh what are the challenges to mainstream education, and how may these challenges be addressed? The question is subdivided as the following:

1. What are the concerns of students and parents about mainstreaming?
2. What are the expectations of students and parents for mainstreaming?

The participants of this study were two students with special needs and two of their parents (mothers) respectively. One of them is a boy from grade V (wheel chair user) and other is a girl from grade IV (learning difficulty) who has just transitioned from special schools to regular class and are typically aged from 10 to 12 years. Marshall and Rossman (1999), noted that the perspective of children is required as they offer fresh insights, and children are especially important in education where they are most affected by policy and program decisions but very often are absent from inquiry. This is also echoed by Ndhlovu (2008), who said that children are at the centre of experiencing the challenges. Parents' perspectives regarding the challenges their children face as they go to school was also investigated. According to Mertens and McLaughlin (2004), parents provide a rich source of information about the strengths, and needs of their children. Porter (2005) recommended that it is important to listen to what the parents want from educational services which their son or daughter are entering and their requirements should be considered patiently and sensitively.

No official list of schools with mainstreamed CSN was made available, so two schools from Dhaka were identified based on information given by special educators and NGO practitioners. These two schools in the study were government primary schools. For each school, the names of at least two CSN were provided. The reasoning behind this criterion was that it would enable the researchers to have at least one student to be interviewed; in case one of the students or his/her parents was reluctant to participate. A number larger than two might have been too much to expect,

as mainstreaming is still new and in its early stages of implementation, so that it may not have been straightforward to locate any schools with more than two CSN. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews. Students and parents were asked to talk about what made it easier for the child to be part of a mainstream classroom, what made it harder for the child to be part of a regular classroom, what ideas they had for what the teacher could do differently, how the classroom could be organized, and how the school administration or leadership could make it easier for the child to come to and learn in the school. Students and their parents were separately interviewed to ensure that the parents did not talk for their children, and so each participant talked independently. All discussions were voice recorded with interviews conducted in Bangla and later translated to English.

## Findings

Results of the study are presented according to key themes, and both the results and the discussions are included under each theme heading. The data were analyzed using qualitative thematic analyses using Baily's (1997) guidelines. This process involved examining the data to determine potential themes. Under each theme various categories are presented. Two CSN and two parents were interviewed with the same purpose: to identify the challenges of mainstreaming CSN and considering opportunities to meet those challenges. The code S1, S2 was used for students and P1, P2 for parents to present their quoted comments.

Students and their parents acknowledged the importance of mainstream education. At the same time, they identified three types of challenges at their schools: (1) negative attitudes; (2) inaccessible school environments; (3) lack of accommodations.

### Theme 1: Negative Attitudes

All participants reported instances of rejection, isolation, or discrimination towards CSN.

#### a) Rejection for Admission

Parents want their children in regular schools. They agreed that it is necessary for CSN to be taught in regular schools. Each of the parents commented on this:

*Every child has the right to get admitted in normal school. Teachers should not reject children whether they have any special needs or not but provide them educational opportunities. They should not be allowed to reject these children if their parents wish them to attend. They have to take a positive approach to include them [P2].*

*I think it is better for everyone if more CSN get the chance to go to regular schools and the best thing that can be done is to implement the law so that no child is refused from any school [P1].*

One of the students also expressed the desire to learn in a regular classroom:

*I want to go to this school with my current classmates. If I can continue here it would be really helpful for my future education [S2].*

However, parents reported that the schools initially refused to admit these children. Even after admission following requests and lobbying, the teachers did not want to take CSN in their classes.

They did not think the CSN would benefit there. They suggested to the parents that their CSN should go to special schools. One parent talked about teachers:

*They say special schools are better than regular schools and it is easier for CSN to learn there. Because, special teachers know more about their special needs and can meet those. Number of students is small there and they have common problems. They will be safer. So, admit there [P2].*

Other parents without special needs children were also reported by CSN parents as having a similar rejection attitude. One parent claimed about other parents who told her:

*He (their son with special needs) is incapable of learning so he should be with other children like himself. I think you're making a big mistake putting him into regular school [P1].*

## **b) Isolation**

Isolation took the form of either being ignored or having difficulty forming friendships with peers. Both parents (who heard from their children and also noticed during their stay at school) and the students themselves reported that non-CSN peers did not enjoy being with them, or did not want to associate with them. Many children without special needs form their own small groups outside and play by themselves.

*Other children do not like me because I am not as pretty as other girls. I feel sad in school. All the children have fun and they play but I have to sit alone in the classroom" [S2].*

*I want more friends in the class who understand me and involve me in their play [S1]. Other students are still very shy. They do not accept my son during play. If someone starts communicating with him, s/he does not continue for next days. So, again my son becomes isolated [P1].*

One mother suggested this solution:

*Teachers should go and sit with CNS and chat with them so they feel as they are part of the class. They can tell other students to play together and this will make them feel they are all equal. This will help others to initiate friendship [P1].*

## **c) Bullying**

The parents indicated that they did not want their children to be bullied:

*I want my daughter to grow up in as normal an environment as possible. I want my child to be treated fairly at school. The school should not allow anyone to be bullied. I don't think it is right for the authority to be careless since they are informed of these hostile attitudes [P2].*

*I hope the children will respect one another because in our culture we show respect for one another. Teachers should talk the whole class, whole school about human differences. They should teach students to focus on the strengths of an individual, not on weakness [P1].*

The students indicated that this was the most painful attitude from peers. Some students are reported to misbehave with CSN all the time and they do not want them to be in their class. Students reported these incidents:

*When other children are not happy with me for any reason, they say bad things. Sometimes they use words like you cripple. Some students like to make jokes about me. They laugh at me without any reason. Some other students tease me to such an extent that I get angry [S1].*

*I do not understand many things in the class. Others then tease me and tell me that my brain does not work like theirs [S2].*

#### **d) Discrimination**

There are discriminations from teachers, peers, parents of other children which both the CSN and their parents talked about. One student complained about peers:

*It seems that some peers think I am less than a normal child. I know that they do not like me and do not want to be my friend. Bright children are unwilling to provide me peer support; they don't want to share their knowledge with me. Even they don't value me when I do better in class [S1].*

One parent voiced her disappointment that parents having non CSN children sometimes think that contact with a CSN may be harmful to their child. She also showed dissatisfaction that some teachers are too selective in choosing children to be in their class activities. Most times they like to avoid CSN in their academic work because she needs more help. She explained discriminatory views of teachers:

*These teachers express that my daughter just can't learn. Her brain does not function well and she simply wastes teachers' time and other child's learning. Sometimes the teachers neglect her and do not care for her. They are also found to compare my child with other kids [P2].*

Other parent supported this statement saying:

*Most times some teachers ignore my child and don't like to correct his/her schoolwork. Sometimes, when they teach the class a topic and my child can't catch up quickly, they totally lose their temper and ignore him. This is the common attitude of teachers that my son reports frequently [P1].*

Instead, parents hope that teachers will be more open in their attitudes, suggesting programs and changes in textbooks that would help everyone to understand the needs of these children:

*I just want you to treat him as a human being. He has lived through many bad experiences when he was young, and he just wants to be treated like other children. I think there should be more awareness raising programs among general students and teachers to decrease the discrimination. It will be helpful if special needs issues are included in text books, so that everybody involved is well informed. Then they may get an understanding of what the special needs students are all about [P1].*

One parent focused on the teacher's positive and caring attitude to educate her child. She suggested changes in teacher training and professional development:

*They must accept every child to sit for class work. If anyone has academic problems, they should find solutions in order to remedy their problems. They should not be too selective on which child should be in their class task. They together should discuss the problems of these children [P2].*

## **Theme 2: Inaccessible School Environment**

All participants mentioned the school environment as being physically inaccessible for CSN, and a major problem is physically getting into school. Schools do not have concrete pathways that would make it easier for the wheelchair to move.

*Normally I have to carry the boy in my lap from the school gate to the classroom. Then I have to go back to the gate, fold the wheelchair and bring it to the class so that he can sit on it [P1].*

Within the school, doorways are not wide enough for wheelchair access. The classroom doors are specially too small and narrow for the wheel chairs to go in. There is also little space between benches within the classroom. These are reported as barriers for free movement within the school.

*I cannot chat with my friend in the class as the wheel chair cannot reach there. I cannot request help from other students, because trying to move towards them distracts the whole class. They have to change their position for me which is difficult for them too [S1].*

Another parent expressed her concerns about recreational facilities of the schools. She stressed that-

*School occasionally arranges music, dance, art and other cultural programs. My son enjoys these much and loves to participate there. But, most times he can't attend just because he must go up stairs. He has some physical limitations and needs help to go up. There is nothing in the stair that he can catch and go up alone [P1].*

The girl student explained her sufferings about toileting and washing facilities of her school. Sadly she expressed that she cannot use these as there is no separate facilities for girls and the existing one is difficult to use.

Both the students and their parents suggested possible ways to improve accessibility and promote full participation. Their suggestions included basic architectural changes to doors, washrooms and classrooms. One parent commented:

*I hope the school buildings will be designed to meet needs of these children. Schools should make classrooms in a way so that these children can move in and out freely. There should be enough space between benches, so that these become free from obstructions. The school should make sure that all children feel safe and happy in school [P1].*

## **Theme 3: Lack of Accommodations**

Effective accommodation of their children was a strong concern of parents. The most common reported barrier was a lack of teachers' understanding about the physical capabilities or limitations

of their children. They also said teachers were inadequately trained to deal with them. The two students said that they have limited access to teaching-learning materials.

**a) Lack of Knowledge**

*Some teachers knew little/nothing about special needs children. They exclude my son from certain class activities without reason. Sometimes they feel annoyed and angry. Actually, I think they do not know how to work with my son. I am not happy with the strategies they use [P1].*

The other parent voiced these barriers as-

*Though the school is providing some facilities for my daughter, these are inadequate. Teachers are very busy with regular students. They have to look after the entire class, so they cannot give special attention and guidance to my daughter. They don't know how to manage large classes of different kids. I think they haven't been trained properly [P2].*

Parents wanted trained and motivated teachers for their children. They urged extensive teacher training for better understanding about special needs education. They also stressed providing equal and appropriate educational opportunities for every student. One parent favored teachers' training saying:

*I believe teachers need some kind of training program so that they can be ready to have CSN in their classes. Teachers who have more experience dealing with these children can teach other teachers of the school. They also can attend workshops of special needs education or can visit special schools for practical ideas. Education Department should arrange training programs for teachers before they start working in school. This will reduce their anxiety for CSN [P1].*

Other parent explained and wished that-

*If the teachers pay extra attention, I don't really think my daughter could slow down in the class. I understand that she needs more time from teachers but she would benefit if they provide sufficient assistance. If teachers can put more effort in helping these children, I think many of these children can do well in their academic work [P2].*

One student expected that-

*Teachers should give extra time for me to complete my reading and exam. They should spend more time with me to help me understand complex concepts. They should put the both fast and slow learner in a group and they have to make sure that bright students are not reluctant [S2].*

**b) Lack of Additional Support and Resources**

Concerns were expressed over limited resources. These schools do not have the resources (such as assistive devices, diverse teaching learning materials, and so on) to create an appropriate environment for CSN. One student said-

*This school has inadequate teaching and learning resources to use in our classes. In my previous special school, there were many materials of different kinds. Teachers used those*

*to make us understand about the subject matter. Here, teachers can't provide us necessary materials [S1].*

Insufficient support was another challenge for these children. A general concern expressed by both parents was that these schools do not get assistance from professional experts to deal with the many physical and psychological needs of CSN. One parent said-

*My daughter needs regular therapeutic services. But this is not available within the school. Without these services, her potential and capacity is limiting down. If not possible for the government to recruit these professionals for full time, they can hire some of them occasionally to train us [P2].*

## Discussion

Students and parents in this study were well aware of the challenges and limitations of mainstreaming as they had experienced it. They identified three specific areas that require improvement in their schools. These include addressing negative attitudes through increased disability awareness programs, modifying physical structures to improve accessibility, and dealing with the lack of knowledge or understanding of teachers through increased training, especially related to using materials or therapeutic services.

### Addressing Negative Attitudes

All four interviewees suggested that negative attitudes towards CSN were serious barriers for their mainstreaming. Students identified this as the worst part of their school experiences. Both of the students had experienced refusal, negative comments, teasing, discrimination and isolation. Similar issues have been identified previously. For example, UNICEF (2003) found that CSN are often marginalized in mainstream schools of Bangladesh as a result of negative attitudes towards them. They often encounter negative treatment from their peers who are not sensitized on disability issues. Most teachers and school administrators are not familiar with the idea of including CSN in mainstream classrooms. According to CSID (2002), many schools are not open to the idea of supporting CSN; even if a few are normally included they encounter negative treatment where peers are not sensitive to disability issues, and teachers have no training. Another report of CSID (2005) reveals that in Bangladesh it has been found that some self-motivated parents are enrolling their CSN in formal schools and facing the challenges; on average 35% of peer learners and 13% of teacher's attitude towards CSN is unfriendly. A study in India by Ashima (2009) noted that CSN are often an easy target for being teased and bullied by their non-CSN peers. Vulnerability to bullying cuts across all types of CSN and was seen throughout schools as a whole.

According to Ackerman et al. (2005), institutional discrimination serves to limit access to education. On the other hand, peers in school play an important role in the lives of the CSN. There is general support for the hypothesis that children who are not accepted by peers are generally at risk for difficulties later in life (Grossman, 2001). Contrary, when CSN receive positive attitudes from their classmates, there is greater chance for successful placement (Nevins and Garber, 2006).

Bangladesh has ratified the UN Convention on the rights of people with disabilities of 2006 (UN, 2006). This ratification comes from endorsement of the vision, even though the education system is far from achieving inclusion of all students in regular school classes, article 24 of the convention states a legal obligation - to ensure the educational rights of all without discrimination and on the basis of equal opportunity. However, it was not true for the students interviewed. This emphasizes the need for positive attitudes of teachers, other parents and peers, when aiming to provide regular education for CSN.

To change negative attitudes, the parents interviewed suggested that the Government should arrange school level programs that include sensitivity and awareness training. According to Pivik, McComas, and Laflamme (2002), this type of program may include: highlighting individual differences as well as commonalities, developing games that would include CSN, discussions about name calling and teasing. According to DFID (2010), a sustained and targeted awareness campaign can increase understanding that education is a basic human right, not only to encourage parents to send their CSN to school, but to make the wider community aware such children should attend school, and should be part of mainstream classes. This is important to begin to break down the discrimination and division within society. Creating parent groups within schools, child-to-child groups, and community groups will also make inclusion more likely to happen and to be sustained.

### **Inaccessible School Environment**

Students with special needs and their parents in this study have the same opinions about access to the school environment. They said that the school infrastructure is not mobility-friendly for CSN. UNICEF (2003) reported that there are barriers for wheelchair movement in formal primary schools. There is no scope for independent movement by children in wheelchairs. Sometimes they have to be carried upstairs. Doors are also not large enough for wheelchairs to pass through. A lack of classroom adaptations hinders the movement of children having special physical needs, including the way that furniture is arranged in the classrooms. Access to toilets is also difficult. Similarly, Grönlund et al. (2010) mentioned that improvement of classrooms in numbers is the issue which so far has been mostly dealt in Bangladesh; main issues are accessibility (e.g. ramps) and toilets. From these observations it was obvious that the physical environment of these schools were somewhat hostile to CNS. One clear reason why students and their parents showed their dissatisfaction is that the environmental barriers are causing restricted participation in class activities, isolation from their peers during play and recreation, and even difficulty accessing water and sanitation.

This is another important finding of this study. Government and the school authorities should think about these barriers and try to reduce it to a minimal level, which may contribute greatly for CSN to access these schools. Simple ramps, the availability of water and sanitation, and changes in the internal arrangements of classroom can easily help the situation. All these facilities will enable CSN to participate in the range of activities in and out of the classroom.

### **Lack of Accommodations**

The respondents indicated that their children needed more support once they were in the classroom. In particular, the evidence shows that the parents were significantly unhappy with the level of the teachers' knowledge. They expressed concern about teachers' knowledge of accommodation for diverse learning styles. In their study with teachers Ahsan et al. (2011) found that many participants expressed a discomfort and or were uncertain about the right position to take when it came to the situation of CSN and their inclusion in the mainstream. In their study Mullick et al. (2012) found that there was no funding for assistive devices or additional care for CSN and a general shortage of learning-teaching materials in schools. The school leaders identified that teachers limited knowledge and skill in developing appropriate learning-teaching activities is an important barrier in getting them to embrace the idea of including all children in their classrooms. Teachers also believed that including CSN in their class increased the workload for them. Where CSN did attend schools in Mongolia, Save the Children's experience (2008) was that many teachers were unaware of their circumstances and needs, and provided no support for them. This is a global problem, according to Lewis (2007a), is that teachers do not want to take on the extra burden needed to be inclusive.

Appropriate accommodations are important to ensure mainstreaming CSN. According to Pivik, et al. (2002), providing all teachers with special needs education training and methods would greatly facilitate a more equitable learning environment. For this, the teachers must plan adaptation activities that ensure all learners' participation (Olivier & Williams, 2005). Wetmore (2005) mentioned that a school system should build a strong learning environment that provides appropriate programs and educational opportunities for every student. This clearly indicates that lessons need to be modified to suit the learning needs of all children. If lessons are modified, teaching and learning will progress smoothly without much interruption from other children. According to DFID (2010), it is urgent to review and adapt where necessary the curriculum, textbooks, examinations and assessment procedures to ensure access and inclusion of all children. Textbooks should be prepared which are clear and contain large writing and short sentences to ensure as many children as possible can use them. Accessible formats such as Braille are needed to enable literacy and access to the curriculum for children who are blind. According to Nath (2009), increased social awareness and protection mechanism through creating educational facilities can protect CSN from educational marginalization.

### **Conclusion and recommendation**

This study was conducted with the aim of determining how children with special needs and their parents viewed and experienced teaching these children alongside children without special needs in regular classrooms. Two students with special needs and two of their parents from two primary schools in Dhaka city were interviewed. This study has focused on factors that are creating barriers to mainstreaming in Bangladesh and also on identifying ways to address these for the success of this new initiative. From the findings, several important issues emerge which need to be addressed. First, attitudes of teachers, peers and parents of other children towards inclusion of CSN were a big concern. All the respondents indicated that the teacher's negative attitudes were impacting on educating CSN in regular classrooms. Attitudes of peers and parents were also reported unfavorable for the progress of mainstreaming process. Hence, positive attitudes are needed to teach to support CSN in regular schools. Thus, it is important for the government to develop and provide awareness not only to teachers but also the parents and children in the schools about the importance of mainstreaming.

Second, the physical environments in these two schools were not designed for CSN in mind. Physical adaptation is needed for access and mobility for CSN. Third, there is a concern that teachers have limited knowledge about how to accommodate CSN, and they have inadequate teaching and learning resources to support them. Teachers need more training in the field of special education. This will provide the teachers with adequate knowledge and skills to cater to CSN. Finally, providing special professional help was requested for CSN. This study provided a snapshot of the experiences of two CSN and their parents regarding mainstreaming, the barriers to and suggested solutions for its success. Based on the whole discussions made, some recommendations are made:

- The Head Teachers need to ensure that no child is refused from their schools and thus s/he can take a lead role to promote mainstreaming. Class teachers need to be careful that all students are provided with appropriate and equal educational opportunities and resources. They should address the diverse learning needs in the classrooms.
- Accessibility to school should be improved by making minor modifications to the physical structure of schools (buildings ramps, accessible toilets, wide doorways, more space in classrooms, etc) to facilitate barrier-free movement for CSN.

- Issues related to special needs should be included in the school curriculum (textbooks, pictures, materials) so that negative attitudes towards CSN can be reduced. Raising awareness on CSN issues at all levels concerned should be systematically initiated.
- There should be further systematic, longitudinal research that is similar but targeting more schools both in rural and urban areas to have a much detail picture of the issue.

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