

Attitudinal Barriers Faced by the Students with Disabilities in Bangladesh: Perspective of Special Educators

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Abstract

This qualitative study aimed at exploring the perspectives of special educators on the barriers which students with disabilities face. Special educators from different parts of Bangladesh was selected as the respondents for this study. The findings from the interpretation of the data derived from them reflected on various attitudinal barriers SWD face: including lack of knowledge and awareness, discrimination in both households and communities, religious prejudices and misconceptions, lack of investment and motivation by parents and an overall negative attitude towards the SWD. This study also shed light on the issue of discrimination the special educators face from mainstream educators and mass people. Based on the findings of this study, it can be assumed that a holistic approach to elimination of prejudices, increasement of awareness and generation of a social movement might eradicate the attitudinal barriers SWD face and transform the society to be more livable for them.

Keywords: Attitudinal barriers, prejudices, discriminations, students with disabilities (SWD), persons with disabilities (PWD), Bangladesh

1. Introduction

“Disability is a form of social oppression involving the social imposition of restrictions of activity on people with impairments and the socially engendered undermining of their psycho-emotional wellbeing”

- Thomas (1990)

In the recent years, disability has become a burning issue in Bangladesh. According to a study by GED in 2015, 9% of the total population of Bangladesh which is more than 15 million people are dealing with some sort of disabilities. In this huge number of people, 29.6% are completely disabled, 43.7% has complex disability and 26.7 percent remain partially disabled (BBS, 2019). Facing deprivation in almost every sector in their life, these people with special needs lacks behind others from their birth. The study by Kibria et al. (2020) shows that likewise other low- and middle-income countries, persons with disabilities are treated as a marginalized group in Bangladesh and often they lack access to basic rights such as health, food, clothing, education and housing.

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1.1 Attitudinal Barriers faced by the SWD

Among all categories of barriers, the most prominent one might be the challenges and barriers SWD face in social situations regarding the behaviors and attitudes from the people around them. Center for Disease Control and Prevention (2020) categorized these attitudinal barriers as:

“Stereotyping: People sometimes stereotype those with disabilities, assuming their quality of life is poor or that they are unhealthy because of their impairments.

Stigma, prejudice, and discrimination: Within society, these attitudes may come from people’s ideas related to disability—People may see disability as a personal tragedy, as something that needs to be cured or prevented, as a punishment for wrongdoing, or as an indication of the lack of ability to behave as expected in society.”

The studies by Ostrom (2005); Baker et al. (2006) and Bisaro (2007), as cited in Jones and Boyd (2011) depicts that the social processes and the institutions, norms and behavioral characteristics influence and shape the interaction and organization of human beings. As such, attitudinal barriers for students with disabilities are far from uncommon in Bangladesh. These barriers affect areas of their lives that have a drastic impact on their wellbeing and social functioning. These attitudinal barriers, associated with the perception of other people, often stigmatize the SWD as their characteristics or identity. Nokrek et al. (2013) mentioned the exclusion, isolation, harassment, and stigmatization that disabled persons face in Bangladesh along with the denial in their basic rights and entitlements. According to United Disability Service (2022) all the other barriers PWD face are the culmination of attitudinal barriers which form the base of discrimination and social stigmas.

Similar conclusions are drawn by the CDC (2020) who focused on the contributions of attitudinal behaviors in generating other challenges for SWD. They depicted the lack of awareness among common people as the reason for the difficulties PWD face in their social life.

In Bangladesh SWD face negative attitudes not only from the society but also from their own family. Studies by UNICEF (2009), Hussain (2008) and Titumir & Hossain (2005) show that the family of SWD feels shame in concealing their relationship in public due to social mockery and insults. Inside the family, they don’t get much importance as they are perceived unproductive and an extra baggage (GED, 2015; Davis, 2016; Sultana, 2010 as cited in Hussain, 2008).

Different studies (Davis, 2016, Sultana, 2010, GOB, IMF, 2005 as cited in Hussain, 2008) show that people from the society around PWD often use insulting words to address the people with deafness, unable to speak, or have any sorts of physical impairments which limits their mobility in social events. People with intellectual disabilities face these sorts of bullying and taunting most. They are called ‘crazy’, ‘mad’ or ‘dumb’. They are sometimes even attacked in public. Discrimination and insulting in family and community situations result in their self-confinement and withdrawal from social affairs. They face social

isolation and mostly lead their lives in complete isolation. Studies (NGDO, 2019; Maloni et al, 2010; Hosain, & Chatterjee, 1998 as cited in Hussain. 2008) specially point out the women with special needs being the most vulnerable as they face discouragement in getting married, choosing partners, or reproducing.

In the study by Henderson and Bryan (2011) illustrates that there are prejudices and misbeliefs among common people regarding the causes of disabilities including results of misdeed or sin committed by the parents, family, community, or the forbears. The depiction of behaviors of mentally challenged individuals as the presence of evil spirits or demonic possession are common phenomena too. Ahmed & Kashem (2015) also displayed similar findings on their study that despite the existence of scientific knowledge regarding disabilities, people perceive disability as the punishment from God.

1.2 Perception of the Special Educators on Attitudinal Barriers of SWD

The 2015 study by Ahmed & Kashem very much focuses on the view of the special education teachers regarding attitude related barriers of special need students in Bangladesh. According to their study, 65 % of the teachers acknowledged the existence of social stigma in various forms. Among them 95% per cent of teachers identified the adverse effect of religious prejudices and misconceptions on the rights of SWD. Most of the special educators indicated that due to not possessing proper understanding of the situations of SWD, people tend to isolate them and show hostility towards them. The study showed similar results to its predecessors that almost all the respondents (special educators) agreed on the common people's perception on disabled persons being burden for the society. Results of this study also aligned with other studies regarding the issues of religious myths and misconceptions such as comprehending disability as results of sin.

The focus of this study is to explore the view of the special educators on the issue of attitude related barriers. Although several studies have been conducted on the attitude of the teachers towards disability, inclusion etc. but there are only a mere number of research that focus on their view on common people's attitude. As they are dealing with students from different communities in different areas of Bangladesh on daily basis, their perspective is very much imperative to shed some new light on the attitude related barriers SWD face in Bangladesh. Besides that, this study will create a better understanding of the probable future strategies to prevent such attitude related barriers.

1.3 Objectives

The specific objectives of this study are:

1. To identify the perspectives of special educators on the attitudinal barriers SWD face.
2. To explore the perspectives of special educators on the probable strategies to prevent such attitudinal barriers.

2. Methods

To explore the teachers' perception in regards of the attitudinal barriers the persons with disabilities face, the researchers adopted qualitative approach in this study. As the study aimed to highlight the teachers' perception, special educators from all over the country were the target population of this research. Among them 30 special educators from different districts who represents the 8 divisions of Bangladesh, were selected as the participants of this study. In this study, purposive and convenient sampling methods were applied to select the participants from the entire population. As this research demands an in-depth view of the teachers' perception, teachers who were accessible and willing to provide information were selected purposefully.

In this study, an in-depth interview questionnaire containing open ended questions was used as the instrument to gather data. The researchers maintained a structured and non-biased environment to search out reliable and valid data.

In-depth interviews were conducted in sufficient time span. All interviews were conducted in person by the researchers themselves. Proper consent was received from each participant before the interview session. All participants had the freedom to leave the interview incomplete the moment they feel offended or uncomfortable and could deny participating in interview.

The detailed data gathered from the in-depth interviews were put to analysis through thematic analysis approach. After preparing the collected data from the interviews, the researchers assigned coding to the data. From the codes, the researchers identified common themes to highlight major patterns. Major findings gathered from the thematic analysis were discussed in detail.

3. Result and Analysis

Several themes and Sub-themes were identified from the in-depth interview. As the research searched the perspectives of the special educator regarding the attitudinal barriers faced by the persons with disabilities, gathered data from the samples are analyzed here thematically. The themes located from the interview reflect the outlook and perspective of the data providers. These themes are discussed below:

3.1 Factors Resulting Attitudinal Barriers

3.1.1 Lack of Knowledge

Almost all the respondents identified that due to insufficient knowledge about disability, most people hold a negative outlook to the students with disability. Regarding this fact one of the respondents stated that,

“A large number of people of our society still think that disabled children are ‘Mad’, and disability occurs as the result of sins created by the parents of those children.”

People also seem to have little or no clue about special education and rebuke the special educators also with humiliating words. A respondent mentioned in this regard that,

“People of our society are mostly unaware of special education and its importance. They even mock at our profession and taunt us as ‘Teachers of mad people.’”

Moreover, all the participants accepted the fact that there is lack of knowledge among people about disabled students as well as disability and this may transmit negative attitude.

3.1.2 Lack of acceptance

Most of the respondents signify that there is lack of acceptance towards persons with disability in our society. In this context, a respondent stated that,

“I have heard from parents that they faced certain circumstances in society where their child was not allowed due to his disability and different characteristics. Before coming to this profession, I never thought this may happen in the urban society too.”

Another respondent stated that,

“In the mall, movie theater and even in the amusement parks maximum people think that the children with disability may create any disturbance or occurrence. Their age level children also show uninterested gesture towards them to play or socialize.”

Rest statements connecting this concern from the respondents also reflect the similar type of finding about acceptance towards children with disabilities.

3.1.3 Negative attitude

Maximum respondent agreed that persons with disabilities are more likely to face negative attitudes than anyone in society. Here negative attitude includes unwillingness to enroll, consideration as unusual, apathetic expression, and extreme manifestation of fear etc.

Concerning unwillingness to be enrolled, one of the respondents stated that,

“Whether it comes about education, co-curricular events, private coaching, or recreational activities, it is harder to be enrolled in any sphere for the children having any type of disability. The unwillingness not necessarily comes every time directly, sometimes it’s the approach that indicates the unwillingness of the responsible personnel.”

Another respondent mentioned that,

“The unwillingness of the authority of regular schools is much observed in the rural areas. The situation becomes worse for those special children whose areas are in lack of special schools.”

A respondent mentioned that many educated and civilized people also seem to be apathetic taking any step towards the persons with disability.

A significant finding regarding this concern by a respondent reflects that,

“Some people intentionally express an outburst expression of fear seeing the special children, as it’s their way of rebuke and negligence towards them. People also mock and taunt if they see the parents of any special child is enjoying in any situation or being happy.”

Maximum respondents agreed that existing rooted negative outlook formulates the negative attitude towards the persons with disabilities, and this negative attitude is dominantly present in our social environment.

3.1.4 Discrimination

All of the respondents identified ‘Discrimination’ as the prime social stigma persons with disabilities face in their daily environment. A respondent stated that,

“I am a teacher, and in my professional career I have seen many of my colleagues holding discriminatory attitude towards the students with disability. I think this discrimination makes their educational possibilities more lessen.”

Another respondent added that,

“As the persons with disabilities are mostly unaware of their social rights, people tend to befool them randomly.”

One of the respondents also mentioned that,

“This discriminatory attitude continues in the family environment too. Even the parents seem to be partial to their non-disabled child than the disabled one when it comes to providing facilities sometimes.”

All the respondents agreed with the fact that persons with disabilities face discrimination in maximum aspects of their life.

3.1.5 Investments and Efforts

This perspective directly shows the lack of motivation among families in spending their investment and efforts of time and money towards the SWD.

A participant mentioned that,

“In an average or middle-class family, it’s obvious that the parents are more willing to spend money to their regular child. Because they typically think the investment provided to their child with disability may not find any future return.”

Another respondent added that,

“Some of the parents are even ashamed of bringing out their special child in any public environment. As a result, they cannot reach to the education and their lives get confined in the walls of their home.”

Considering the fact of the effort a special child receives from his family members, a respondent said,

“Some families are aware of the intervention and therapy services. But many of parents do not bring their child to regular checkup or therapy sessions.”

Another participant added that,

“I mostly see parents being impatient and wanting quick solutions, but in term of following instructions their responses are not sufficient each time.”

Outcomes gathered from the respondents reflect that persons with disabilities need more attention, efforts, and investments comparatively. But the findings of this study reflect that they are lagged in context with these opportunities.

4. Discussion

The findings from this study draw a clear and in-depth picture of the attitude related barriers the SWD face in Bangladesh from the perspectives of special educators. Most of the participants in this study acknowledged the fact that among the common people of Bangladesh, specially in the rural areas, disability is still treated through the looking glass of misconceptions and prejudices. Aligned with the findings of several research on this issue such as UNICEF (2009), Hussain (2008), Titumir and Hossain (2005), findings of this study demonstrate the existence of attitude related barriers SWD face from their family and their community. Children with special needs are considered a burden and thus get excluded from family life, social events and relationships. Along with these sorts of behaviors, families even display negative attitude towards their educational privilege. Findings from this study also show that most of the common people possess adverse ways of thinking towards special education let alone inclusive education. A clear negligence to the SWD regarding their education is evident. Findings of the study depict the tendency of stinginess among parents in funding the education of their children with special needs. Rather than spending money on their education, the tendency of confining such children within home was found to be a common trait too.

Additionally, findings from this study shed some light on the attitude of parents regarding treating disabilities as some sort of disease and asking the educators to remedy it as quickly as possible. Special educators face these kinds of demands from parents frequently. As the article by Woods (2021) represented that the parents of the children with special needs lacks interest in the schooling of their kids due to the belief that they refuse to acknowledge their children’s special needs, or they don’t want to be disturbed. Moreover, teachers often come across the fact that parents bring their children with special needs only for therapy facilities in school, not to bring them into special education process. Because of this mindset, parents quickly get frustrated when the disabilities prevail. As a result, they become unsatisfied and tend to show more negativity towards the special needs of their children.

On the issue of bullying of the special educators, the findings on attitude related barriers from the community in this study align with the study by Hussain (2008). Researchers of this study stumbled on the view of special educators regarding issues such as lack of awareness and negativity among the community. The study also sheds light on the issue of bullying faced by the teachers of SWD by common people. An in-general unfamiliarity with the field of special needs and special education might be the crucial factor behind these attitudes.

Children and people with disabilities often get isolated by communities. In Bangladesh, a vast majority of the parents of regular children tend to possess negative attitude towards mixing their kids with the likeness of children with special needs, both in social and educational situations.

Religious misconceptions and prejudices play a vital role in forming these sorts of negative attitudes among the communities. This finding is on par with the results of the studies by Henderson and Bryan (2011) and Ahmed & Kashem (2015) which also depicted that people consider disabilities as result of the sin and show a general unacceptability towards the SWD. Common people tend to isolate not only the children with special needs but also their parents and families too. These hateful behaviors reach to such a level that the people from the communities don't tolerate even the slightest happiness that might come across the families with SWD as if they are meant to suffer in agony forever.

This study also brings forward the view of educators themselves, especially the teachers from mainstream education. There is a widespread predisposition of general education teachers showing discrimination towards SWD. They tend to discriminate among the students not only in academical situations but also in sports tournaments and such.

One of the limitations of this study might be the fact that this study focused on the perception of teachers, while the combination of perception of parents and mass-people would be imperative to draw an overall conclusion on this matter. Also, the findings of this study might not represent the scenario of the SWD who are in the higher studies.

5. Conclusion

The study has attempted to explore the attitudinal barriers SWD face from the viewpoint of special educators. The context of this study mainly focused on the teachers' perception, which shed in-depth light over the issue as they experience firsthand the barriers their students face and the barriers, they face themselves. After interpreting the opinions from the teachers in the field of special education across the country, it can be concluded that even though there are many awareness initiatives by both government and non-government organizations, the existence of negative and adverse attitude towards SWD still persists in Bangladesh. On a final note, it can be contemplated that a countrywide initiative to raise awareness among the mass-people regarding disability and special education can be a solution to these barriers. But this initiative won't be fruitful without the proper engagement of all the stakeholders which need to be ensured first. This research will help the stakeholders to take proper steps to eliminate the barriers and establish positive mindset towards the SWD among people of Bangladesh.

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Biography

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