

**Education for Disabled Children in Bangladesh: Perceptions, Misconceptions and Challenges**Prof. Neaz Ahmed<sup>†\*</sup> and Abul Kashem<sup>‡</sup>**Abstract**

Despite having specific policy, laws and services, disabled children in Bangladesh are facing troubles in obtaining education. Poverty, limited institutional services, lack of trained teachers, weak academic support, etc. are the most common visual causes behind their physically challenged conditions but the root causes remains hidden in our social system. The paper describes as to how people view the concept, educational need and importance of the disabled children while considering existing social, cultural and religious misconceptions and stigmas. Besides, opinion of the respondent are also described here. Based on quantitative research method, the data was collected from disabled children, their parents and their teachers through interviews and observation of the researchers. The findings reveal that majority of the population considered in the study are still maintaining different attitudes. Moreover, religious and cultural trends are not in favour of the disabled children. Families are found more attentive and sensitive but external supports are not appropriate to ensure their educational rights with harmony. Even disabled children often fail to receive proper cooperation and mental support from their institutions, society and from their parents. However, changes are visible but at a slower pace, and this trend should be speeded up. The paper also probes for the opinions and suggestions of the parents and teachers to overcome those barriers and limitations. The study was conducted in the Sylhet city of Bangladesh covering general and specialised schools where disabled children attend.

**Key words:** Challenges, Disabled Children, Education, Misconception and Perception, Sylhet, Bangladesh

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## Introduction

The concept of disability has been a matter of discourse due to its multiple meanings and theoretical explanations. Defining disability is often complex and controversial and there is no universally agreed definition (Nokrek et al., 2013) but a fairly recent phenomenon emanating from Western societies (Coleridge, 1993), it is necessary to define disability for the purpose of policymaking (Grech, 2009). Generally, the term disability is used to refer to the individual's inability to function normally to fulfil their daily needs. It includes three-tier impairment— impairment, handicap and disability. Though it is argued that disability is associated with culture but Metts (2004) identified it as a complex interconnected bio-medical, social and environmental phenomenon that is yet to be fully analysed and understood. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD, 2006) focused on person's long term impairments, which hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others (WHO, 2011). Similarly, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), 1990 (cited in Sultana, 2010) defines it as physical or mental impairment, which substantially limits one or more of the major life activities. In Bangladesh, the Persons with Disability Welfare Act, 2001 describes disability as the physical, mental, visual or intellectual impairment due to which a person fail to participate in its normal day-to-day activities. Whatever the meaning is, disability is the state of one's inability to maintain a normal life without taking any help from any source. Such condition makes them dependent and bound to seek attention, assistance and cooperation from family, society and the state. Indeed, disability is a very common social reality throughout the world; in 2006, the United Nations estimated that 10-12 per cent of the world's population has some form of disability (World Bank, 2006).

In Bangladesh, relevant statistics on disabled population and their educational situation are not adequate and reliable due to the absence

of proper database and survey. Even differences between government and non-government statistics often create ambiguity in understanding the situation. The Disability Welfare Act, 2001 has defined disability (Article 3) and identified four broad categories— physical, visual, hearing and mental. A comprehensive survey on the prevalence and status of disabled persons in Bangladesh has not yet been undertaken (UNICEF, 2003). The estimated number of persons with disabilities in Bangladesh is around 140 million people, which constitutes 10 per cent of its total population (Faruque, 2008). Surveys conducted by different NGOs indicates different rates of prevalence of disabilities in Bangladesh— while Bangladesh Protibondhi Kolayan Samiti (BPKS) ([www.bpkssbd.org/pwd\\_bdpolicy.html](http://www.bpkssbd.org/pwd_bdpolicy.html)) records 7.8 per cent, in another survey conducted jointly by Handicapped International (HI) and National Forum of Organizations Working with the Disabled (NFOWD) have found the disability rate as 5.6 per cent. However, this study indicates that among the disabilities, 32.2 per cent suffer from visual and 27.8 per cent suffer from physical— much higher than other categories. The study of HI and NFOWD found that the overall prevalence rate of disability is higher in Dhaka division (8.2 per cent) compared to 4.2 per cent in Chittagong division, closely followed by Khulna and Sylhet division (4.3 per cent), while in Barisal and Rajshahi divisions, the rate of disabilities are 6.4 and 6 per cent respectively. Though the prevalence rate is lower in the hill tracts and the coastal areas (2.8 and 3.7 per cent respectively), it is higher in the Char and the Haor<sup>1</sup> areas with 6.7 per cent). The Government of Bangladesh surveys in 1982, 1986 and 1998 estimated the national prevalence rate of disabilities at 0.64, 0.5 and 1.60 per cent respectively. It might be due to

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<sup>1</sup>*Char* is a sandbar usually made of sand, silt or small pebbles formed generally within a river course (usually temporary) due to its process of erosion and deposition. And *Haor* is a wetland ecosystem in the north eastern part of Bangladesh, which is a bowl, or saucer shaped shallow depression, also known as a back swamp.

the differences on the definitions and data counting methods. The Disability Welfare Act, 2001, in its Article 17, describes about the specific responsibilities of the state and other non-government organizations, and in Articles 4-14, it illustrates about the provisions of forming various Committees. Moreover, the provision for creating a separate database for disabled is also mentioned here. Following its suggestions, although information has been collected in the both 2001 and 2011 Census of Bangladesh but the data retrieved fails to address their number and situation adequately.

Access to quality basic education is a fundamental human right for all children as outlined in the international commitments such as: the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), the World Declaration on Education for All (1990), the Salamanca Statement (1994), the Dakar Framework for Action (2000) and, most recently, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2008). Education is the constitutional rights of the citizens of the country. In recent years, Bangladesh has showed remarkable contributions to the education arena. In terms of increasing the enrolment of primary school children, the country is well on track of meeting the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) target. Net Enrolment Ratio (NER) in 2013 was 97.3 per cent (Girls: 98.2 per cent, Boys: 96.2 per cent). Focused and substantive initiatives undertaken by the government such as distribution of free textbooks among students up to the secondary level; providing of scholarships to female students up to the higher secondary level, holding public examinations and announcing results within the stipulated time and creation of the Education Assistance Trust Fund for the poor and the meritorious students, food for education, stipends for primary school children, media outreach, and community or satellite schools have all helped in boosting the NER. The government has been working to improve the quality of education alongside increasing literacy rate to build an illiteracy-free Bangladesh by 2014 as announced in the Vision 2021 document (GED, 2014).

But these achievements have some limitations as the country has failed to ensure the educational right for all groups of people equally, especially the persons with disabilities are still facing problems and discrimination in receiving education. The government is committed to follow international conventions regarding disability and thus they are proving their willingness by creating educational and other services, stipend, etc. following the provisions of the Disability Welfare Law 2001 and the National Policy on Disability 1995. However, the question is that whether these services and facilities are enough to cover all the people with disabilities living in the country. Even it is very hard to realize the actual situation due to inappropriate database. One recent study under the ESTEEM project of Primary Education Development Project (PEDP-I) has found that about 75 per cent of children with disabilities are not enrolled in any form of educational program (Yahia, 2004). A study by the Impact Foundation Bangladesh in the Chuadanga district found that disability is directly correlated with literacy status. The majority of persons identified as disabled (77 per cent) were concentrated in those households where most illiterate persons lived.

Like other vulnerable peoples, persons with disabilities are the victims of social realities and live in miserable conditions. Several studies show the disabled in Bangladesh are commonly excluded, isolated, harassed, stigmatised and denied their basic rights and entitlements (Nokrek et al., 2013) resulting higher rates of poverty (DFID, 2000; ADB, 2002; Thomas, 2005). Even poverty leads them to maintain inadequate healthcare and nutrition and relatively high exposure to disease and injury (DFID, 2000; Solarsh and Hofman, 2006). Education and skill development scopes for the people with disabilities in the country have not been developed or created (CSID, 2002) and the situation is still inadequate. For this reason, children with disability often face numerous obstacles in receiving education. Except few exceptions, access to school and retention in school are negatively influenced by the fact that school management committees

(SMCs), community leaders, and village leaders (Imams) do not accept children with disabilities. School managers (principals and head masters or mistresses) do not welcome them either, reflecting community attitudes that children with disabilities will harm other children or they are “hopeless” to teach. Indeed, disability has been a burning social issue in Bangladesh but their problems are still unexplored. The study aims to explore and to understand the problems, challenges and desires regarding their educational right. The article was developed on the basis of a study conducted by the authors and financially supported by the University Research Centre (URC) at Shahjalal University of Science and Technology, Sylhet, Bangladesh.

### **Methods and Data Collection Techniques**

The nature of the study was descriptive following quantitative research method. The Sylhet city was selected as the study area purposively. As this area is the composition of plain, hills, haors, and different studies suggested that the disability prevalence rate is higher among hill and haor areas (Titumir and Hossain, 2005). Disabled students who were studying at different general and specialised schools in this city were the population of the study. As there is no specific data about the population, 25 students were interviewed purposively from ten general schools and three specialised schools. At the same time, equal number of parents and teachers were interviewed. The data for this study has been collected through interview schedule. Three standardised interview schedules were developed to collect data from the respondents. Each schedule was developed for particular respondents. The schedule emphasised mainly open-ended questions covering all aspects of the research objectives. Corresponding questions was developed to explore the detailed information on issues such as nature of exploitation, challenges, threat, limitations, cooperation and personal experiences of the disable people, teachers and parents. Observation of the researchers also used as a tool for data collection. The study

covered both the male and female students with disability at primary and secondary level. Among the student respondents, 68 per cent were female. Majority of them were aged between 10 to 15 years and a significant numbers were more than 15 years old. As there is no specific list of the children with disabilities, so it was quite difficult to maintain their gender and age ratio. Students studying at general and special schools were interviewed and among them 40 per cent were from the primary level and 60 per cent were from the secondary level. Among these respondents, 36 per cent were found from government primary school. Among others, 24 per cent of the students belonged to non-government deaf and dump school. The study clearly indicates that non-government schools (64 per cent) are dominating over the government schools as far as disability education is concerned. The study covered all types of children with disabilities. Respondents were interviewed purposively and for this reason proportion of types were not equal. Among the students studying at different classes, 28 per cent were visually impaired and 24 per cent were physically challenged. Among others, 4 per cent each was found both visually and intellectually impaired. A significant number of the respondents (24 per cent) were found to have been suffering from multiple disabilities.

### **Results and Discussions**

#### **Perceptions and Stigmas about Education**

Most of the people in Bangladesh, guided by the social taboo, seemingly suffer from the scarcity of knowledge about disability. In addition, perspectives that guide general people to perceive disability is influenced by stigma, ignorance, impairment-based definitions. Moreover, information relating to disability is scarce in public domain (Titumir and Hossain, 2005). With the prevalence of such negative attitudes, mass people often fail to recognise the needs and rights of the PWDs (Person with Disabilities). Disabled people on average fare worse in relation to employment, material wealth, education, health, access to development assistance and poverty relief, and

in social well-being (Gooding, 2006). As in many other developing countries, disabled in Bangladesh tend to be neglected and as a result are inadequately protected or supported (Nokrek et al., 2013). They are often deprived of not only from the social and the political needs, but also from basic human needs. Though the Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh guarantees human rights and equality in all respects, but (CSID, 2002; Sultana, 2010) they often live in unfriendly and hostile environments, encounter non-cooperation, ill treatment, neglect and hostility in their families, in communities, in wider society, and in government institutions. In South Asia, many local people classify disability as social deviancy (Titumir and Hossain, 2005). There is, however, a growing realisation that the greatest problems faced by children with disabilities are prejudice, social isolation and discrimination (UNICEF, 2003).

Different opinions were found regarding educational needs and importance but in some cases, similar perceptions were also seen. Ensuring education would benefit both disabled and the society as a whole, as mentioned by significant number of respondents. Respondents among teachers (18 per cent) strongly opined that by receiving education, the disabled children would be able to obtain a job and become economically empowered. However, such confidence is not found in more than 13 per cent students and 7.5 per cent parents, as they remain cognizant of the social reality of the country. The children and the parents also indicated that education would enlighten them with new thinking in their lives. On the other hand, institutional environment offer them the opportunity to learn modern life and strengthen their coping capacity. In that process, disabled students would be able to understand their role, status and thereby help themselves to become a responsible citizen. Considering the social view and reality parents remained seriously concerned about the future of their children. In connection to this, 20 per cent parents believed that the society would not make any fun if they become educated and thus their situation would be changed. If the

disabled could perform their social activities, they would be able to break the stigma that they are no more a social burden but are human resources.

Mixed responses, and in some cases, controversial opinions were unfolded in our research regarding social perception. Majority of the teachers (63 per cent) indicated that society often undermines the educational needs and importance of the disabled children. Nearly half of the students and parents also supported this opinion. Respondents also shared about the societal thinking and views. A significant number of respondents, that is, 18 per cent teachers 10 per cent pupils and 13 per cent parents viewed that society perceives that education would not make any positive change in their lives. 6.06, 4 and 10.87 per cent teachers, students and parents respectively consider spending money for their education as wastes. In Bangladesh, where millions of children without any disabilities face many challenges in receiving educational facilities and where thousands of educated youths remain unemployed, thereby, the aforementioned views of the respondents are not anomalous. However, it is appalling as well as damaging when people try to establish their own thinking and discourage disabled children and their parents about receiving formal education. A significant number of parents and disabled children (14 and 17.39 per cent respectively) received negative comments and discouragement for formal education from the society. However, 14 per cent students and 10.87 per cent parents were appreciated by positive social perceptions. People viewed that education would reduce sufferings of the disabled pupils (as mentioned by 6 and 10.87 per cent students and parents respectively) and it would make them able to serve the society (as indicated by 10 students and 4.35 percent parents).

Our findings reflected that the most important sources of encouragement for disabled children are their families who perform a crucial role in managing the children in their daily lives. Over 90 per cent of the guardians were positive in

their outlook regarding the impact of education on the physically challenged children. It is also worth mentioning that mixed opinions were sought from both students and their parents in terms of utilising the education. While 20 per cent viewed that education is the basic right of the children, others were conscious about their future. 15 per cent of those who were interviewed believed that education would help the disabled children to establish their future, while 30 per cent opined that it will enable them to become self-dependent. 15 per cent of the respondents believed that education would help them to overcome their limitations and to perform like normal people, while 10 per cent opined that upon receiving proper education, common people would not be in a position to exploit them easily. 17 per cent respondents among the children also indicated that their families are very much attentive to reduce their sufferings and 20 per cent responded that their parents' wishes to establish them through education. However, this attitude is not uniform among all the families considered for this study—a 28 per cent family wishes to provide basic education to their disabled children. Apparently, 8.57 per cent students also reported negative family perception.

### **Social Stigma**

The culture of Bangladesh holds a negative view on disability and impairment and thereby contributes to oppression. However, this research unfolds that this existing trend is gradually changing as majority of the respondents considered in this study view disability with positive attitudes. 56.25 per cent disabled students and 68 per cent parents of these disabled children did not face social stigma. Among the teachers, 34.29 per cent had positive views on disability. However, 65 per cent teachers, 44 per cent students and 32 per cent parents viewed that social stigmas still prevail in Bangladeshi society in different forms. Respondents claimed, as already known, but further reinforces that social stigmas and taboos towards the disabled peoples make them alienated. Majority of the respondents indicated that people often fail to understand

and show sympathy towards disabled people's limitations—their physical or mental inabilities; rather they try to isolate them from the mainstream community. The majority of the respondents also revealed that most people think that the disabled peoples are the burden of the society; they are the symbols of sin, and therefore, people makes friends with them. Few of the respondents also indicated that most people do not like to see them studying at general schools because of the myth that they would disturb not only the environment of the schools but also perturb the general students and hamper the educational environment therein. Some of the respondents also noted that people sometimes make negative comments on the disabled children.

### **Religious Myths and Misconceptions**

Disability is often linked with religious myths and misconceptions. Despite having strong scientific arguments regarding disabilities, people are more likely to view it as the natural punishment given by the creator. Existence of such myths influences not only people's attitude, but also affects the service delivery system, no matter how well designed it is. Interestingly, majority of the students (62.16 per cent) fails to find any impact of religious myths on disabilities. This could be due to their minor age. However, 55.56 per cent teachers and 56.67 per cent parents opined that most people in Bangladesh believe that disability of a person is the result of a sin committed by that individual. Nonetheless, in the case of religious misconceptions on disabilities, more than half of the parents opined that people are gradually changing their mind-sets, which tend to reduce the religious misconceptions on disabilities, but 95 per cent teachers views that various types of religious misconceptions prevail in Bangladeshi society that often tend to disharmonise the educational rights. Even majority of the students also indicated about the existence of negative religious misconceptions on disabilities. Most of the respondents commented that people often equate disabilities with burden and fail to understand the situation of the disabled person. Further,

the respondents opined that most people believe that formal education would not make their lives better. As they are the outcome of one's sin, so they should learn only religious education that will help them in two different ways— first, with the help of religious education, they would gain mercy from the almighty and this would probably open their source of income for their future existence. Second, as majority of the people of Bangladesh are Muslims, so it will be very easy for the disabled persons to seek help and assistance from the people if they have any religious mark(s) (like wearing Islamic dress) on their bodies. Unfortunately, a 10 per cent parents considered for this study holds similar views regarding the educational necessities of the physically challenged.

Like the religious myth, religious misconceptions are also seen in the society. However, more than half of the parents (65.67 percent) and a significant number of students (35.14 percent) did not find any religious misconception whereas only 5 percent teacher believed that religious misconceptions on disabilities do exist. 12.5, 10.81 and 6.67 per cent of teachers, students and parent respectively commented that religious education is more important for a disabled child rather than formal education. While 35 per cent teachers, 16.22 per cent students and 23.33 per cent parents mentioned that religious education would help them to get relief from their sins. It is important to notice that 15 per cent teachers opined that many parents are interested to give religious education to their children only to secure their future life. These parents think that religious education would help them to earn money, which is easily not possible through formal education.

### **Challenges of Education**

Like the different types of stigmas and misconceptions, some unavoidable barriers tend to shackle their educational achievements. Our observations unfold that from family life to social and school life, the disabled children face hindrances and where they veer to withdraw themselves from their everyday challenges,

either because of their limitations or because of the feeling of shamefacedness in making contacts with others. With such hard realities, it is very difficult to maintain and continue education with harmony. The study investigated the challenges and obstacles regarding education at various levels.

One of the key questions of this research was to explore as to how the parents view the necessity of education for their disabled children. The findings suggest that majority of the respondents viewed disabled children do get either equal or special attention from their parents when it comes to accessing educational facilities. Only 17.86 per cent teachers and 11.76 per cent parents viewed that disabled children are less opportune or their facilities depend on the economic conditions of their families. Such positive attitudes could be due to the intervention of government initiatives and awareness development drives on disabilities. However, accruing positive family attention is only the one indicator in understanding the everyday challenges of a disabled child in receiving education. The problem of disabilities is more subtle few more factors are important to understand their educational challenges.

Disabled students face problems in making contacts with their friends, classmates and teachers unless they possess special instruments or mechanism to reduce their obstacles. Respondents commented that physical environment and the very structure of schools with little or no facilities for the disabled children often create hindrances for them to communicate with their peers or even their teachers. Their common problems include proper viewing of the black board, taking their seat in the classroom and movement within the school. These problems are however common for those students who attends the general schools. Some parents of these children even commented that their children find it difficult to write class lectures. However, those students (64.29 per cent) attending the special schools opined that they do not face any difficulty at school. This is because the physical structure and environment of these schools are well

designed to unblock the challenges faced by the disabled children.

Nevertheless, as stated above, the disabled students have to struggle at schools to perform and cope with their everyday chores. Thus, one can argue that they are discriminated on the basis of their limitations. Generally, they are restricted to participate in cultural activities. 15.63, 11.11 and 34.29 per cent teachers, students and parents respectively commented that they are restricted to participate in cultural activities. Very few of them could get chance to participate in games and sports (18.75 per cent teachers, 8.33 per cent students and 14.29 per cent parents) mentioned the inability of the disabled children in participating in games and sports. 5.56 per cent students and 11.43 per cent parents commented that these students receive less attention from their teachers. While 6.25 per cent respondents complained that these students are made to stand back during class assembly, 9.38 per cent commented that the absence of special measures and facilities creates problem for them.

Understanding class lecture is one of the major challenges for them but it depends on their school environment and types of disabilities. Students attending the special schools are fortunate enough to receive special arrangements but those who study at general school face severe problems in understanding class lecture. Challenges are far more arduous for those who have multiple forms of disabilities or different types of disabilities other than physical. Among the teachers, 25 per cent opined that pupils with disabilities are very slow in their reactions but very few of parents (only 4 per cent) agreed upon it. Fifteen per cent teachers mentioned that as a result of the challenges faced, disabled pupils feel shame to ask questions in class or do not share their academic problems. 12.5 per cent teachers feel that because of their disabilities, they remain less attentive in the class hours. Seemingly, 9.38 per cent students and 12 per cent parents commented that the levels of understanding of the disabled pupils are weak

and thereby, majority of them fails to be quick learners. In addition, 10 per cent teachers and parents and 6.25 per cent students opined that disabled pupils' fails to maintain their everyday academic achievements, as they are unable to write down class lectures. Further, a significant portion of parents (22 per cent) and 6.25 per cent students mentioned that the teachers often fail to take proper care for the disabled pupils.

Problem in day-to-day mobility is very common among the disabled children. This is one of the greatest challenges of daily commuting back and forth from school, especially in the city areas where road traffic, accidents and transportation problems are very common. While 34.21 per cent students commented on that, they do not face any problem while commuting to their school daily but parents are more sensitive about the issues of road safety. Indeed, majority of the parents fear for the safety of their children and thereby, hesitate to leave them alone. Our findings show that 72.73 per cent parents do not allow their children to go alone to school. At the same time, 28.95 and 33.33 per cent students and parents respectively opined that without any assistance they are unable to commute to school, while 7.89 per cent students and 15.15 per cent parents face the regular traffic problems of the busy roads. In the said context, 28.95 per cent students and 33.33 per cent parents complained that they face utter difficulties to embark on a public transport almost on a daily basis during school time, that is, during the rush hours.

Students having disability usually face the problem in doing their homework or in maintaining their academic activities without any assistance. Though 35 per cent student respondents informed they do not face any difficulty and are able to complete their academic tasks, only about 20 per cent parents commented that their children were able to complete the home tasks without any help. The findings suggest that those pupils who face minor disabilities are able to complete their homework independently but those children



facing major or multiple disabilities often fail to perform their academic duties. More than 12 per cent parents and pupils mentioned that appointment of private tutor is difficult, as they are not habituated in dealing with disabled children. 15 per cent students and 20.37 per cent parents remarked that the disabled children need assistance regularly in finishing their homework. 14.81 per cent parents viewed that they face difficulty in teaching their children. About 12.96 per cent parents viewed that their children take more time to complete their tasks, while 7.41 per cent parents commented that the key problem with the disabled children are that they behave in an imbecilic manner and thereby, do not cooperate with their parents or others in completing their homework.

As disabled children have to depend on external help and support, they often seek help from their classmates and teachers during the school hours. This research also tried to probe the opinion of students and parents on the extent of help received from their teachers and classmates. In response to this question, 27.5 and 23.91 per cent students and parents respectively reiterated that the disabled children always received help and cooperation from their peers and teachers. However, as mentioned above those students attending general schools are less fortunate in obtaining cooperation when compared to students attending the special schools.

### **Motivation for Education**

Although in Bangladesh primary education is free and compulsory, but each year thousands of children remain out of school or drop out from school. Among them disabled children are the most common group. Given such impediments, it is a tedious decision for the children to remain in school unless one bears strong self-motivation and support of their families. Our findings revealed that 22 per cent had prime motivation is to become established (22 per cent), 14 per cent to gain a suitable job which in turn would enable them to contribute to their families. 10 per cent children believed that education would help them to become

responsible citizens and enlighten their lives through knowledge and skill gathering. Significantly, notable portions (12.5 per cent) of the respondents were conscious about their rights and they opined that they are obtaining education to establish their educational rights provided by the state.

We also tried to explore the parental motivation on continuation of education of their children. 32.5 per cent parents believed that proper education would reduce the day-to-day sufferings, while 20 per cent wanted cope with the hostile social situation. Only, 15 per cent opined that their children would be established through proper education. However, a significant number of them were motivated to provide equal opportunity as their other children hold.

### **Educational Support**

Despite having government initiatives, 60 per cent pupils and 56 per cent parents respectively suggest that they have not received any financial, social and institutional support to access education instead they depend on their family income. However, 12 per cent students and 24 per cent parents whose children attends special schools that they are fortunate as they have the opportunity to study in free and special schools, while 20 per cent pupils and 12 per cent parents responded that they received stipends under the Urban Social Services program but others remain out of any coverage. Although, only 8 per cent students reported that their school authorities provided social support but no such social support were visible. It is true that some families were not interested to receive any social support but the respondents opined that it is difficult to obtain such support from their relatives or other people.

Despite having constitutional guarantee and legal provisions, disabled children in Bangladesh often face series of problems and limitations in acquiring education. To overcome the problems and limitations of obtaining education, the respondents have given pragmatic suggestions. Both the teachers and the students (15.71 and 20 per cent

respectively) emphasised on creating more job facilities and vocational training whereas 17.14 per cent parents accentuated on economic support. As disabled students often face problems at schools, so, significant number of students and parents (18.33 and 15.71 per cent respectively) suggested for special care by the teachers. At the same time, 10 per cent teachers suggested that the parents should be more attentive to their children for their education. Our societal attitudes are not supportive and because of this reason, there should be a change in mind-sets. Many of the respondents underscored that school environment and positive atmosphere play vital roles for their education. 13.33 per cent students and 8.57 per cent parents raised demands for desirable and friendly school environment. Besides these, awareness buildings, establishment of more special schools, different evaluation for disabled children, etc. were some other suggestions given by the different categories of the respondents in order to ensure their educational rights.

### Conclusion

Being the citizen of the state, disabled students not only deserve equal rights, facilities and respect, but more than that. Unfortunately, ambiguous and complex social perceptions and attitudes regarding disabilities often represent them differently. Even existing legal measures and social services do not meet their basic necessities including education. The present government has taken some initiatives in favour of disabled people like student stipend, monthly allowance, micro-credit programme, vocational training and 2 per cent Government job quota etc. but hostile social situation and attitude sometimes do not allow them to avail those opportunities. Situation becomes more critical for a disabled child when she/he fails to receive essential support; cooperation and attention from her/his own family. Social changes are visible in our country, but many people still practice traditional thinking. All these have been hindering their access to education along with other rights. We believe

and it may true that without ensuring peoples' awareness, sensitisation and responsiveness regarding disability, no initiative would be successful herein. State is the primary responsible party to take necessary actions and initiatives but society cannot ignore their responsibility. Similarly, government should be more active in implementing the existing laws, policies and provisions regarding disable peoples' educational rights. Without qualitative change in social perceptions, government would not be able to bring qualitative change of this issue. Need of the hour is to ensure active participation of mass people to raise disabled students' voices. Finally, policy makers should consider this issue for necessary actions in order to ensure the educational rights of the disabled so that they can reduce the challenges of their everyday lives.

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