



## Children's Rights and Inclusive Education in Bangladesh: Analyzing Policy Gaps, Practical Challenges, and Strategic Pathways

Dijendra Chandra Acharja<sup>1</sup>, Bikram Biswas<sup>2\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Upazila Assistant Primary Education Officer, Habiganj Sadar, Habiganj

<sup>2</sup>Department of Educational Administration, Noakhali Science and Technology University

Received Date: 01-Jul-25 | Revision Date: 01-Aug-25 | Publication Date: 09-Oct-25

### Abstract

This study examines how socio-economic status, geography, gender, and institutional capacity shape children's access to rights and learning. Using a mixed-methods design, data were gathered from 32 schools across 16 upazilas (1,920 students in Grades 3–5 and 7–9; 128 teachers; and 160 School Management Committee members via 16 focus groups). Quantitative questionnaires and qualitative interviews/FGDs were thematically analyzed. Findings show that poverty and low parental education are strongly associated with limited access to learning materials, nutrition, psychosocial support, and voice at home and school. Rural children, especially girls face constraints related to mobility, early marriage, and reduced participation, while urban peers report greater opportunity and recognition. Despite a robust legal framework (CRC, CRPD, national policies), implementation is hindered by uneven teacher knowledge of IE policies, limited training and resources, and attitudinal barriers among adults. The study argues that inclusive education cannot be realized through isolated initiatives; instead, long-term, integrated strategies are required combining poverty reduction with rights-based pedagogy, teacher professional development, gender-responsive measures, rural resource allocation, and structures that elevate children's participation (e.g., student councils/ "mini parliaments"). Translating Bangladesh's policy commitments into lived realities will require coordinated action by schools, families, communities, and government to ensure equality, dignity, and participation for every child.

**Keywords:** Children's rights; Inclusive education; Socio-economic inequality; Rural–urban disparities; Teacher capacity; Bangladesh.

### Introduction:

Education is one of the fundamental rights of every child, and this right is reinforced through the implementation of inclusive education. Thus, child rights and inclusive education are inextricably linked. Universal primary education, irrespective of sex, race, ethnicity, or religion, has been recognized as a major right in the Constitution of Bangladesh (UNICEF, 2020). Education not only ensures the right to learning but also contributes to children's overall development, well-being, and growth (Sen, 2003). Despite this recognition, a significant proportion of children in Bangladesh are unable to enjoy their basic rights, as nearly one-third live below the international poverty line (Matubbar & Arifuzzaman, 2022). Poverty particularly affects marginalized communities, especially those who are geographically or culturally isolated, thereby limiting children's educational opportunities and academic progress (Begum et al., 2019). The concept of inclusive education has therefore been established as a catalyst to ensure access, presence, participation, and achievement for all learners, including those from disadvantaged groups



(UNESCO, 1994). According to UNICEF (2014), developing an inclusive educational culture and environment, along with strong institutional commitment, is essential for eliminating barriers to quality education. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), adopted in 1989, outlines children's rights as the foundation for their holistic development. Bangladesh ratified this Convention, committing itself to fulfilling the rights of all children irrespective of caste, creed, or culture, thereby promoting an inclusive society. Implementing children's rights requires a dedicated platform where children can develop their abilities, express themselves, and actively participate in decision-making (Ruiz-Casares et al., 2017).

Children's fundamental rights include access to education, adequate nutrition, health and hygiene, protection, participation, recreation, safe water, and sanitation, all of which can only be ensured within an inclusive social system (Mohajan, 2014). Inclusive education, as defined by Booth and Ainscow (1998), is a philosophy that guarantees an effective, appropriate, and affordable education system within the community for all children. While Bangladesh has enacted various policies and legislation in line with international declarations on child rights and inclusive education, the practical realization of these commitments remains limited. Nilholm and Göransson (2017) highlight that the concept of inclusion is often used ambiguously in academic discourse, lacking theoretical clarity. Inclusion is ultimately about uniting all sections of society, rich and poor, under a framework of equality and non-discrimination. Inclusive education goes beyond placing marginalized students in mainstream classrooms and it requires restructuring the education system to accommodate all learners equitably (Ainscow, 2005). Many scholars agree that integrating all children into regular schools is the most authentic way to combat discrimination and promote equality (Krischler et al., 2019) based on Salamanca Declaration and the global movement for Education for All (UNESCO, 2020). However, the practice of child rights and inclusive education has not yet met expectations in Bangladesh due to persistent challenges such as poverty, ignorance, negative attitudes, social structures, and institutional limitations. This paper seeks to analyze how existing policies and legislation reflect the principles of child rights and inclusive education in the context of Bangladesh. Specifically, it aims to identify current challenges and opportunities, assess the extent to which policies and laws benefit children, and evaluate levels of awareness among students, teachers, parents, and School Management Committee (SMC) members. The study also provides insights that can inform policymakers in strengthening strategies for the effective realization of children's rights and inclusive education. To achieve the objectives of this study, the research raises two main research questions; What are the existing practices of children's rights (CR) and inclusive education (IE) in Bangladesh? and What gaps exist between national and international policies and the implementation of CR and IE in Bangladesh?

## 2. Literature review:

### 2.1. *Child, Child's right and inclusive education*

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989) defines a child as any individual under the age of 18. However, Bangladeshi legislation has applied varying definitions across different legal instruments. For example, the *Children Act of 1974* defines a child as an individual under 16 years of age, while the *Anti-Women and Children Oppression (Amendment) Act, 2003* also considers anyone not over 16 years as a child. According to the *Court of Wards (Amendment) Act, 2006*, an orphaned child who reaches the age of 18 may claim or dispose of



inherited property (Mohajan, 2012a). In contrast, the *National Child Policy 2011* aligns with the UNCRC by defining children as all individuals under 18 (MWCA, 2011).

Safeguarding the rights and dignity of children must begin at the family and school levels. The UNCRC treats children as full human beings, emphasizing their rights to participation, protection, and respect for their views. Sinclair (2004) highlights three indicators of child rights freedom of choice, participation, and decision-making whether individually or collectively, as essential to advancing children's rights. Under Article 42 of the CRC (1989), signatory states, including Bangladesh, are obligated to implement these commitments within their national frameworks. Ensuring children's rights requires an inclusive society that provides a non-discriminatory environment where every child is guaranteed opportunities for development. Inclusion fosters behavioral and attitudinal change by uniting all social groups within a framework of equality. When children's fundamental rights are upheld and quality education is provided, the positive effects endure throughout their lives (Save the Children, 2014). Inclusive education plays a critical role in this process. It becomes meaningful only when teachers, parents, peers, and communities treat all children including those from marginalized groups and those with special needs equally. Such inclusivity requires educational institutions that embody fairness and diversity within broader inclusive societies (Antonak & Livneh, 2000). According to the United Nations (n.d.), inclusive education values diversity and differences, creating opportunities for positive recognition and acceptance. Thus, the fulfillment of children's rights is inseparable from the establishment of inclusive societies, which can only be achieved through the effective implementation of inclusive education.

## ***2.2 The Relationship between Children's Rights and Inclusive Education***

Human beings possess certain rights that are essential for their optimal development (Veerman, 1992, cited under the UNCRC). Among these, education and well-being are widely recognized as fundamental rights (UNICEF, 2020). The development of a child, therefore, is intrinsically linked to the exercise of his or her rights within society. In Bangladesh, however, poverty, ignorance, prejudice, and inequality are deeply embedded at multiple levels of society. As a result, awareness of both individual and collective rights remains limited. Despite these challenges, Bangladesh has made notable progress in achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and continues to pursue the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), both of which provide important platforms for promoting equality and ensuring every child's right to quality education. The holistic development of children can only be realized when every child has the opportunity to exercise their rights fully. Evidence from more developed countries demonstrates that reduced inequality within social systems is closely associated with inclusive practices in education. Establishing inclusive societies through inclusive education is thus central to reducing disparities and promoting equal opportunities. Children's participation plays a crucial role in sustaining democratic societies. According to Sinclair and Franklin (2000), participation strengthens children's rights by enhancing their legal responsibilities, socialization, decision-making skills, protection, empowerment, and self-esteem. Inclusive participation enables children to become active contributors to their communities, thereby reinforcing both democratic values and social equity.

Education is indispensable for realizing children's rights, and this must be pursued through the principle of equal opportunity. The implementation of inclusive education ensures that all children irrespective of caste, creed, culture, or socio-economic background enjoy the same access to learning opportunities (Powell et al, 2016). Inclusive education eliminates divisions by promoting



equality and fostering a non-discriminatory environment for all learners. Aligned with the global vision of Education for All, inclusive education emphasizes the right of every child to equitable educational opportunities. As Ainscow (2003) describes, inclusive education is “the process of addressing barriers to the presence, participation, and achievement of pupils in local neighborhood schools” (p. 15). Similarly, Malak et al. (2013) highlight that the practice of inclusive education requires the integration of policies, guidelines, and procedures rooted in the principle of equality. Children’s rights cannot be fully realized without the effective promotion of inclusive education. Inclusion not only guarantees equitable access to education but also provides the foundation for equality, social cohesion, and sustainable democratic societies.

### ***2.3 Context of the Study***

Bangladesh has made significant progress in social development over recent decades, including poverty reduction, higher primary school enrollment, and the elimination of gender disparities at the primary and secondary levels (UNICEF, 2020). The country has already achieved many Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and is pursuing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with primary enrollment rates now close to global averages (UN, 2021). Children comprise about 36 percent of the population, highlighting their critical role in achieving long-term national goals such as Vision 2041. Despite strong economic performance, however, growth has widened inequality, and access to quality education and health remains uneven, limiting the realization of children’s rights (UNICEF, 2020). Socio-economic disparities remain the most significant barrier to inclusive education and child rights. Poverty undermines children’s access to education, nutrition, health, and psychosocial development (Peverill et al., 2021), while income inequality directly affects learning outcomes (Noble, 2016). In rural areas, children, particularly girls and those with disabilities face entrenched discrimination, superstition, and exclusion (Malak & Khanam, 2011). Active participation, essential for realizing rights, is often constrained by poverty and rigid family structures (Willow, 2002). Children from low-income families rarely enjoy opportunities to express themselves or take part in decision-making (Mohajan, 2014).

Institutional and attitudinal barriers further hinder inclusive education. Negative attitudes among teachers, parents, and peers contribute to discrimination based on gender, class, and geography, often undermining children’s motivation and leading to dropout (Ulug et al., 2011; Villamor & Bulat-ag, 2017). Although Bangladesh’s constitution guarantees non-discriminatory education, and global frameworks such as the UNCRC and Salamanca Declaration reinforce these commitments, policy implementation remains uneven. Gender-based barriers are especially pronounced: rural girls continue to face early marriage, limited mobility, and sexual harassment, which restrict their access to education despite policy commitments (Suchana, 2020; Iqbal, 2022). Finally, broader structural and external challenges exacerbate exclusion. Violence against children, both at home and in schools, undermines safe learning environments (Khan, 2020). Malnutrition, child labor, and inadequate sanitation continue to threaten children’s well-being (Mohajan, 2014). The COVID-19 pandemic has deepened existing inequalities, widening the rural–urban and rich–poor divide (Munir, n.d.). Although the government and non-governmental actors are working to promote inclusive education and children’s rights, centralized policy-making and weak implementation mechanisms have slowed progress (UNICEF, 2020). Addressing these challenges requires a multi-sectoral approach that combines legal frameworks with community participation and institutional reform.

### ***2.4 Legislation and Policy Framework on Child’s Rights and Inclusive Education***



The concept of an inclusive society has gained global recognition as an approach to building non-discriminatory communities that ensure the fundamental rights of every child. To realize this vision, the United Nations has introduced numerous initiatives including agreements, conventions, and declarations aimed at safeguarding children's social security, their right to education, and their overall well-being. Particularly, inclusive education is recognized as a human right-based approach that guarantees education for all. This principle is reflected in both the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (CRC, 1989) and the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (CRPD, 2006). Article 28 of the CRC and Article 24 of the CRPD both declare the right to education, while the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994) reinforced the commitment to education for all within inclusive learning environments. As a signatory country to these international conventions, Bangladesh, has taken legislative and policy measures to fulfill its obligations. The government has enacted several key frameworks, including the *Children Act 2013* (replacing the earlier *Children Act 1974*), the *National Children Policy 2011*, and the *National Education Policy 2010*. The Constitution of Bangladesh (1971) also preserves the principles of inclusive education, particularly under Articles 17 and 28, which guarantee equal access to free and compulsory education, prohibit discrimination on the basis of caste, creed, religion, gender, or place of birth, and emphasize equality before the law (Acharja et al., 2021). Article 19 underscores the elimination of socio-economic inequality, while Article 27 ensures equal protection for all citizens.

In addition to these, several national laws contribute to the protection of children's rights and the promotion of inclusive education. These include the *Prevention of Women and Children Repression Act (2000, amended 2003)*, the *Pornography Control Act (2012)*, the *Bangladesh Labour Act (2006)*, the *National Child Labour Elimination Policy (2010)*, the *Child Marriage Restraint Act (2017)*, and the *Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act (2010)*, among others. Policy initiatives have also included multi-year national action plans, such as the *National Action Plan to Prevent Violence against Women and Children (2013–2025)* and the *National Plan of Action for Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking (2018–2022)*. To operationalize these policies, the government has launched large-scale programs such as the *Primary Education Development Program (PEDP)* and *Teaching Quality Improvement in Secondary Education Project (TQISE)* (Malak et al., 2013). These initiatives have contributed to progress in achieving the MDG targets and advancing toward the SDGs (UN, 2021). However, research consistently highlights that despite the existence of progressive legislation and policies, challenges remain in practice. Weak policy implementation, inefficiency, and indifference at different administrative levels hinder the realization of inclusive education and child rights (UNICEF, 2020). While Bangladesh has made considerable efforts, significant numbers of children remain deprived of their rights to nutrition, literacy, sanitation, and well-being due to persistent poverty, marginalization, and social inequality. Scholars caution that even strong policy frameworks cannot guarantee success if they fail to translate into effective practice (Ainscow & Miles, 2009; Bourke, 2010; Slee, 2006). This disconnect between policy and practice underscores the need for systemic reforms, greater accountability, and community-level engagement to ensure that inclusive education becomes a lived reality for all children.

### 3 Research Methodology

#### *Sampling Procedure*





From the eight administrative divisions of Bangladesh, four were selected using a random sampling procedure. Eight districts were selected (Two districts from each district) conveniently from each selected division. 16 upazilas were selected randomly based on **eight** districts. Two schools were included in the study (one primary and one secondary) from each upazila. In each primary school, 20 students (five boys and five girls from grades three, four, and five, totaling 60), along with two male and two female teachers, were selected. Similarly, in each secondary school, 20 students (five boys and five girls from grades seven, eight, and nine, totaling 60) and four teachers (two male and two female) were selected. In addition, School Management Committee (SMC) members were included as participants. Sixteen Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were conducted across the upazilas, each involving 10 SMC members (five from primary schools and five from secondary schools). Efforts were made throughout the process to ensure gender balance and equal participation of men and women to minimize bias.

### ***Participants***

The following table summarizes the categories and numbers of participants:

SL. No	Categories of Participants	Number of Institutions	Number of Participants
1	Students at Primary School (Grades 3–5)	16	960
2	Students at Secondary School (Grades 7–9)	16	960
3	Teachers at Primary Schools (Male & Female)	16	64
4	Teachers at Secondary Schools (Male & Female)	16	64
5	Focus Group Discussions (SMC Members)	16	160

### ***Data Collection Tools***

Both quantitative and qualitative tools were applied. Four main instruments were used: Questionnaires (with closed- and open-ended questions) for students, Semi-structured interview schedules for teachers, FGD for SMC members, Document review based on relevant literature. The student questionnaires were divided into three sections: Part I: Demographic information (e.g., age, gender, occupation, address). Part II: Questions related to children's rights. Part III: Questions related to inclusive education. Closed-ended questions allowed multiple-choice responses, while open-ended questions enabled participants to express personal experiences and perspectives. Teachers participated through semi-structured interviews, while SMC members contributed through guided FGDs. Questionnaires were distributed via school head teachers, collected after one week in sealed envelopes to ensure confidentiality.

### ***Data Analysis***



Quantitative data from closed-ended questions were analyzed statistically. Qualitative data from open-ended responses, interviews, and FGDs were analyzed thematically. Following Creswell (2015) and Menter et al. (2011), responses were repeatedly reviewed, coded, and grouped into themes. Emerging themes were indexed and recorded systematically (Pope et al., 2000). FGD conversations were recorded, and key elements were extracted to enrich the analysis.

### ***Ethical Considerations***

The study followed established ethical guidelines to ensure informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation. All participants provided prior written consent and were assured of the anonymity of their responses. The right to withdraw at any stage was emphasized. Data were collected and stored in accordance with data protection standards and professional ethical codes (BERA, 2011; SERA, 2005; UWS, 2016).

### **4. Findings**

This section discusses the main themes and findings derived from respondents' views regarding the limitations in promoting children's rights and inclusive education, despite the existence of sufficient policies and agreements. The analysis is based on the perspectives of respondents and highlights key issues such as the impact of socio-economic conditions, levels of educational attainment and awareness, access to fundamental facilities, prevailing attitudes, and adverse circumstances.

#### ***The financial condition of the respondents and their social status***

A comparative overview of the participants' social position was obtained by examining their financial status to assess the extent to which socio-economic conditions influence children's rights and the implementation of inclusive education. The results are presented in Table 1 below.

Table -1

<b>Status</b>	<b>Frequencies</b>	<b>percentages</b>
Solvent	1092	57%
Poor	786	41%
No answer	42	2%

Table 1 presents the socio-economic status of the participants. More than half of the respondents (57%, n = 1,092) reported being solvent, while a substantial proportion (41%, n = 786) identified themselves as poor. A small fraction (2%, n = 42) did not provide any response. This distribution suggests that although a majority of participants were relatively solvent, a significant portion still lived in poverty, highlighting the socio-economic disparities that directly influence the realization of children's rights and the implementation of inclusive education.

<i>Occupations</i>	<i>Frequencies</i>	<i>Percentages</i>
Farmer	921	48 %
Businessman	154	8 %
Day labor	269	14 %



Fisherman	230	12 %
Expatriate	38	2 %
Employer	134	7 %
Others	173	9 %

Table 2 presents the occupational distribution of the participants' families. Nearly half of the respondents (48%, n = 921) came from farming households, reflecting the agrarian nature of Bangladesh's economy. Day laborers (14%, n = 269) and fishermen (12%, n = 230) also represented a considerable share, indicating the prevalence of low-income and informal occupations. Businessmen (8%, n = 154) and employers (7%, n = 134) accounted for a smaller but significant portion, while expatriate workers (2%, n = 38) formed the smallest group. The "others" category (9%, n = 173) included a range of miscellaneous occupations.

This distribution highlights that the majority of participants came from rural and labor-intensive professions, which may limit economic stability and directly affect children's access to rights and inclusive education opportunities.

#### *Impact of financial status to practice children's rights and Inclusive Education at home*

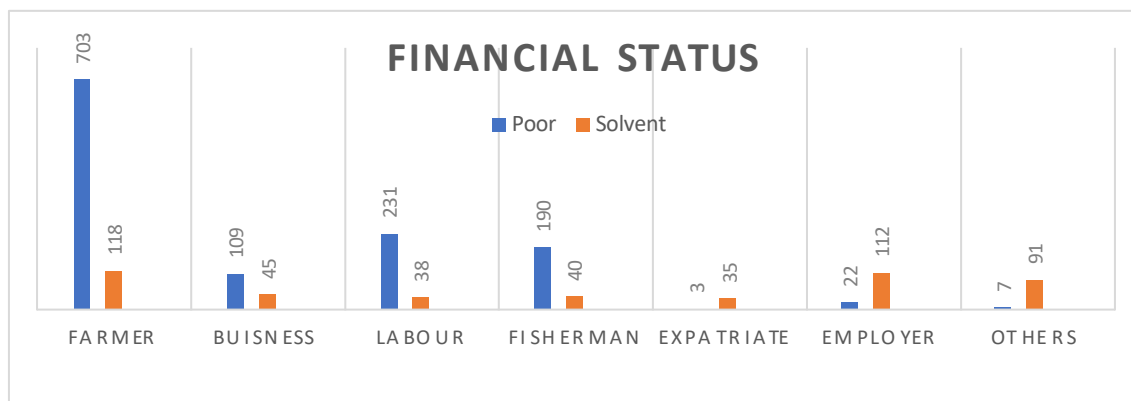


Figure 1 shows that the poverty rate is particularly high among farming, laborer, and fishing communities. A comparative picture emerges from the survey, teacher statements, and focus group discussions, revealing how a child's economic background influences the realization of inclusive education as a fundamental right. An SMC member noted that both economic and educational status largely determine the overall condition of a family: *"The more well-off and educated the family members are, the more motivated they are to take care of the child's health, education, nutritious food, and even the psychosocial aspects of the child and the rights of the child."* Conversely, this awareness was found to be largely absent among poorer and less educated parents.

As a result, children from low-income families were perceived to lag behind their peers from more affluent and educated households, both academically and socially. While children's rights, preferences, and emotions are often respected in affluent families, participants reported that these aspects receive less importance among poorer households. One teacher admitted: *"Children from poor families often feel their opinions are not valued by their parents."* Supporting this view, 42% of students from poor families stated that they were afraid of their parents and therefore refrained from making demands. In contrast, 67% of students from well-off families reported: *"We respect our parents a lot and are not afraid of them. Our parents are very attentive to our needs."*





Several direct statements highlight these disparities. A student explained: *“When I ask my parents for something, they cannot give it to me. I even asked because my school uniform was torn, but my father could not replace it because he earns nothing to support the family.”* Similarly, a parent in an FGD admitted: *“Economic inequality affects a child’s psychosocial development. When a child comes to school from a poor family, their status with teachers and classmates is not the same as that of a child from a well-off family.”*

At the same time, teachers emphasized that children themselves are generally non-judgmental: *“Children have soft hearts, so when they mix with each other, they do not judge who is poor or rich. Rather, they treat each other as good friends. The problem arises mainly from parents, who create this dividing line, and eventually it spreads to the child.”* Another student illustrated the impact of family circumstances: *“My father works all day and comes home late. My mother also works to support the family. What my father earns is not enough, so my family cannot afford school supplies. I often feel upset because I cannot fit in with my classmates.”*

Taken together, these findings indicate that economic inequality not only limits material access—such as school supplies and uniforms—but also influences parental attitudes, psychosocial development, and children’s sense of inclusion in both school and society.

### ***Impact of geographical location to practice children’s rights and Inclusive education***

Food, health, clothing, education, shelter, participation, and protection are among the most fundamental rights of children, forming the basis for the enjoyment of all other rights. To examine how far children in Bangladesh are able to exercise these basic rights, participants were asked a series of questions, the results of which are presented in Figure 2.

The findings reveal that geographic location significantly influences the enjoyment and protection of children’s rights, particularly in relation to education. Gender inequality further compounds these disparities. According to the survey, 83% of respondents reported that urban children are better able to enjoy their basic rights and thereby promote inclusive education (IE), while only 15% believed that rural children enjoy their rights adequately. Furthermore, 82% of respondents observed that girls are disproportionately deprived of their rights, creating barriers to inclusive education. This trend was reported as more acute in rural areas, where girls face greater restrictions in exercising their rights. Specifically, 86% of respondents noted that urban girls enjoy their rights properly, compared to only 9% of rural girls. Village girls were described as facing limitations in mobility, freedom of speech, and participation, whereas urban girls were reported to enjoy greater independence. Focus group discussions supported these findings, with participants highlighting that both boys and girls in cities perform better in education than their rural counterparts. A rural teacher shared: *“A student in my school received a marriage proposal when she was in the ninth grade. The girl did not agree, but due to strong pressure from her parents, she was ultimately forced to marry.”* Another teacher contrasted this with urban contexts, noting that while child marriage still occurs in cities, it is far less prevalent due to higher parental education and independence, which shape more progressive psychosocial attitudes.

Respondents also emphasized that rural students perceive themselves to be at a disadvantage compared to urban peers. In fact, 86% of rural students reported feeling left behind in terms of educational opportunities, freedom of expression, participation in decision-making, and parental responsiveness to their opinions. Focus group participants noted that urban parents tend to be more aware and socially engaged than rural parents. Furthermore, urban families are often better-off and



employed in stable jobs or businesses, which makes them more invested in their children's future education and career prospects. Taken together, these findings suggest that both geographic location and gender exert direct and indirect influences on children's access to rights and opportunities. As one teacher concluded: *"Geographical location plays a direct and indirect role in children's access to opportunities and education."*

### ***Effect of socio-economic status on behavior toward children***

Despite the existence of various policies on children's rights and inclusive education, the behavior of teachers, parents, and peers toward children often remains inappropriate, exerting a significant impact on children's upbringing and attention to learning. The following chart presents participants' views on several related issues, including teachers' concentration on poor, disadvantaged, urban, and female students.

	Yes	No	No comments
Is teachers' attitude positive towards only poor children?	55%	42%	3%
Is teachers' attitude positive towards only affluent children?	74%	22%	6%
Is teachers' attitude positive towards only boy children	79%	12%	9%
Is teachers' attitude positive towards only girl children?	87%	9%	4%
Is teachers' attitude positive towards only rural children?	75%	19%	6%
Is teachers' attitude positive towards only urban children?	67%	31%	2%

Socio-economic conditions largely determine people's position in society, and their impact is reflected in both educational institutions and broader social spheres. Evidence from focus group discussions shows that this influence shapes behavior and interactions. Despite the existence of various national and international policies, social inequality persists, leading to behavioral differences in the treatment of children. A teacher admitted that socio-economic disparities contribute to unequal behavior toward students in education, particularly along rural–urban, rich–poor, and gender lines. Findings presented in Table 3 reveal that 75% of students from villages experience differences in teacher and peer behavior compared to their urban counterparts. Similar disparities are observed between well-off and poor students, as well as between male and female students. One SMC member explained: *"We, the parents, also pay attention to who our children mix with in school, who their playmates and study partners are. I want my child to socialize with families of a status similar to mine."* Teachers noted that this psychosocial tendency among parents is reproduced in children's behavior, reinforcing social divisions.

When asked why such inequalities persist despite strong laws and policies, focus group participants revealed that: *"Most teachers have heard about the policies, but do not know their details. Even if some are aware, they feel limited in implementing them."* A parent further noted:

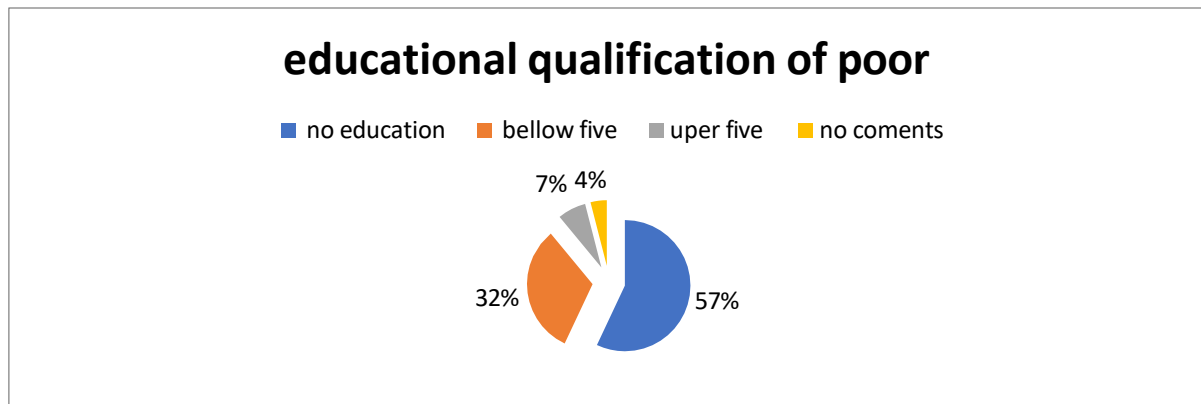


*“Not only teachers, but also classmates and some parents treat my child with prejudice because I come from a lower class.”* Teachers acknowledged that such behavioral differences exist in classrooms but suggested they are gradually decreasing, adding that raising social awareness could help eliminate them.

Students also shared their experiences. One remarked: *“The cooperation of teachers towards me is good, and as a result I attend my daily classes and complete my studies.”* In contrast, a female student said: *“I often cannot come to school due to family conflicts between my parents. Because of this, teachers do not pay attention to me since my results are not good, and I do not feel comfortable mixing with my classmates.”* A focus group discussion concluded: *“A joint initiative of teachers and parents is needed, but there is no commendable initiative from society or school authorities. As a result, the impact is on the child.”* Another teacher affirmed: *“With the joint efforts of everyone, the implementation of the policy is possible.”* Overall, these findings highlight the critical role of socio-economic inequality in shaping behavior toward children and demonstrate that, despite policy commitments, practical implementation requires joint efforts by teachers, parents, and communities to create a more inclusive and equitable educational environment.

### ***Impact of education and unconsciousness on children's rights and Inclusive education***

Figure 4



Analyzing the data in a mixed-methods approach reveals that parents from affluent families tend to have higher levels of education compared to those from indigent families. As a result, they are more aware of children's rights and place greater emphasis on their children's education. Evidence for this is illustrated in Figure X.

The chart indicates that 57% of parents from poor families reported having no formal education, while 32% had only attained up to the fifth grade. By contrast, 84% of parents from well-off families had higher levels of education. These findings suggest that economic hardship directly influences parental educational attainment, which in turn impacts children's lifestyles and educational progress. Educated parents are generally more conscious of their children's rights and better equipped to support their learning, while uneducated parents often lack awareness and the capacity to provide adequate guidance. Teachers strongly reinforced this observation. One noted: *“The guardians of poor families live from hand to mouth. So, they cannot think about education, and this impacts the child's overall progress.”* Another teacher added: *“They are unaware, so they cannot understand the rights of children. As a result, they often impose their unwise decisions on children, and children are bound to obey.”* In fact, 91% of the 64 teachers interviewed agreed that

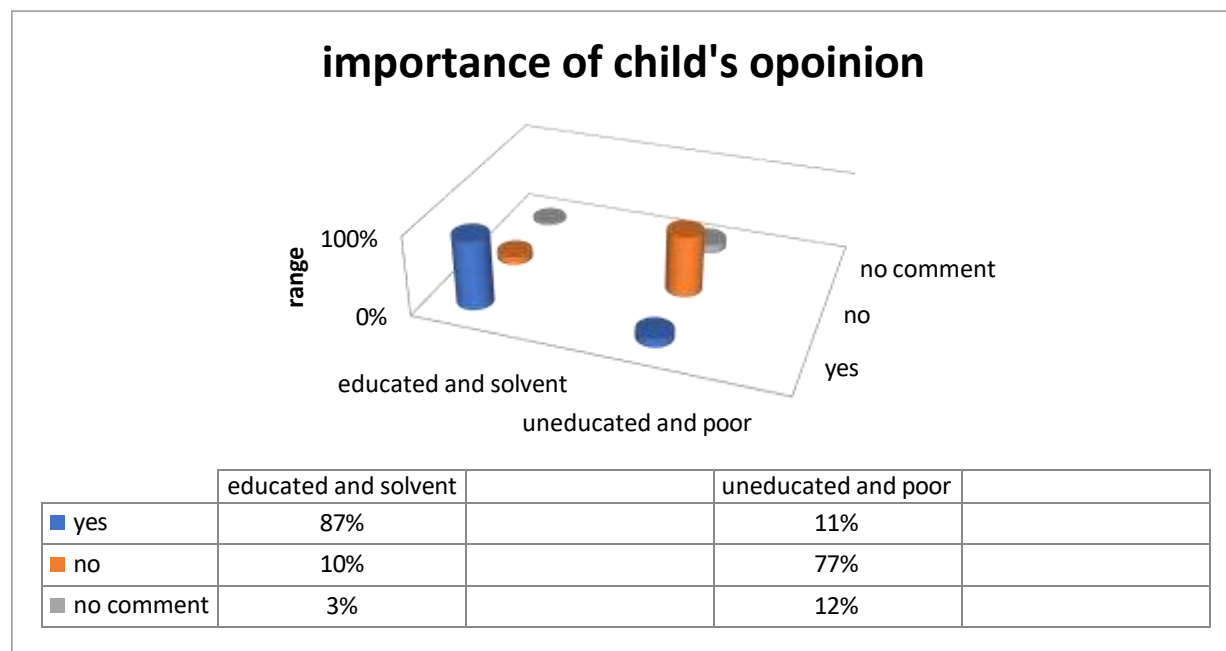


economic hardship affects parental education, which subsequently influences children's academic, physical, and mental development. Consequently, many parents are unable to provide the necessary support to promote children's rights and inclusive education.

Students also voiced their struggles. One remarked: *"My father is a poor farmer, and my mother is illiterate. I do not understand many things while studying at home, but I do not get any help from anyone. As a result, my results are not good."* Parents echoed these challenges, with one admitting: *"Even the teachers in the school do not always help these students."* Focus group discussions further revealed that, although many marginalized families recognize education as a right, poverty prevents them from providing the necessary resources for their children's learning, leading to poor academic outcomes. SMC members also pointed to systemic issues: *"We have many realistic policies, but the reluctance of those responsible for implementing them and the lack of awareness among parents act as obstacles to their success."* Teachers stressed that educated parents are more likely to understand their responsibilities, respect their children's emotions, and provide a supportive environment conducive to skill development. This, in turn, fosters a balanced social system free from discrimination and supports inclusive practices in educational institutions.

Finally, focus group discussions emphasize the need for parents and adults to prioritize children's mental health. Strengthening mental well-being was seen as essential for academic achievement and socialization, both of which are integral components of children's rights and inclusive education.

### ***Impact of children's participation to promote children's rights and Inclusive Education***



The following chart presents participants' opinions on whether it is necessary to give importance to children's views.

The data show that 87% of participants from educated and well-off families believed that children should be listened to, as it enhances their self-awareness. In contrast, among children from poor and uneducated families, 12% did not provide an opinion on this issue, 11% thought that children's



opinions should be valued, while 77% felt that children should not be given such freedom. Qualitative responses provide further insight into these differences. One teacher observed: *“Uneducated parents think that if they give their children freedom to speak freely, they will lose control over them.”* A similar sentiment emerged in focus group discussions (FGDs), where some parents expressed the belief that *“Children should not be given priority to speak flatulently.”*

Teachers, however, offered a contrasting perspective. Ninety-two percent of teacher respondents agreed that children should be given opportunities to express their opinions, noting that doing so stimulates self-motivation, self-recognition, self-confidence, and ultimately enhances academic progress. As one teacher remarked: *“These kinds of activities promote the social skills of children and help develop their socialization.”* Overall, the findings suggest that while educated parents and teachers recognize the value of listening to children's voices, poor and uneducated families often resist this practice due to traditional attitudes and fears of losing parental control. Nevertheless, most participants acknowledged that creating space for children's opinions is crucial for developing self-confidence, social skills, and inclusive educational practices.

Figure - 6



*“Listening to children is very important because the confidence it instills in them enables them to play an important role in their future lives,”* explained one SMC member. A student echoed this sentiment: *“When I want to say something, my father doesn't want to listen to me. He tells me that it is not yet time for me to decide on anything.”* Another student added: *“I need to be listened to because if I am not, how will my parents understand what I want? As a result, my wishes remain unfulfilled.”* Participants further noted that when children are not listened to, they may develop arrogance and stubbornness, which can lead to misbehavior with their peers. Conversely, when children grow up with confidence, the process of socialization enables them to build goodwill and healthy relationships with classmates. Focus group discussions highlighted that inclusive education not only ensures children's rights but also fosters socialization, which is a critical component of inclusion.

Teachers observed that tendencies toward socialization are stronger among children from educated families, as they often receive this guidance at home. However, class-based discrimination persists: some children from affluent families are reluctant to mix with marginalized peers. One teacher remarked: *“Children should be encouraged to listen to everyone, otherwise they learn about discrimination from a young age.”* Schools were identified as key spaces where such attitudes can be challenged. Because children from diverse backgrounds study together in one setting, teachers and school authorities have an important role in shaping behavior and promoting inclusion. Strong





leadership and proactive efforts by schools can help reduce class-based discrimination, foster socialization, and strengthen children's rights within inclusive education frameworks.

## 5. Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that, despite Bangladesh's commitments to national and international frameworks on children's rights and inclusive education, a significant gap persists between policy and practice. Socio-economic inequality, geographical disparities, and gender discrimination continue to shape children's access to educational opportunities and rights. Socio-economic status emerged as a critical determinant in the realization of children's rights and inclusive education. Children from marginalized families, such as those of farmers, day laborers, and fishermen, are often deprived of basic educational materials, proper nutrition, and psychosocial support. Most of the teachers, guardians, and SMC members consistently acknowledged that poverty diminishes children's educational opportunities and weakens their self-confidence. In contrast, children from rich and educated families met need to have their children, which fosters greater self-confidence and stronger educational progress. The findings of this study confirm that socio-economic conditions and parental education are interdependent factors that directly affect children's inclusion and development. Geographical disparities were also clearly evident. The results also show that urban children benefit from greater educational opportunities, freedom of movement, and freedom of expression, whereas rural **children**, especially girls face severe constraints like early marriage, family pressure, and limited institutional support further restrict their opportunities for growth. This rural–urban divide indicates that, despite policy commitments to inclusive education at the national level, rural institutions remain structurally disadvantaged.

Gender inequality was identified as another major barrier to inclusive education. The study findings reveal that girls in rural areas are disproportionately disadvantaged due to entrenched customs, including early marriage, restricted mobility, and parental prejudice. While boys are generally able to assert their rights more freely, girls continue to face systemic deprivation. This stands in contrast to Bangladesh's formal commitment to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which it has ratified, but has yet to fully realize in practice. Finally, the study highlights institutional and knowledge-based limitations in implementing inclusive education. Many teachers admitted that, while they are aware of inclusive education policies, they lack detailed knowledge, training, and resources to put them into practice. Parents from marginalized families, though aware of the importance of education, are constrained by financial hardship and limited psychosocial support, leaving them unable to adequately support their children. These institutional and psychosocial gaps further reinforce inequality and hinder the effective implementation of inclusive strategies in classrooms. In summary, although the Constitution of Bangladesh and related legislation recognize children's rights and inclusive education, their effective implementation remains undermined by socio-economic inequality, cultural practices, and institutional weaknesses. Addressing these challenges requires not only strengthening teacher training and institutional capacity but also fostering visionary leadership in schools and greater social awareness to reduce structural inequities.

## 6. Strategic Pathways

The following strategic steps are proposed to formulate and implement effective plans for ensuring the practice of children's rights and inclusive education in Bangladesh:



### ***1. Increasing Awareness and Capacity of Guardians***

- Community-based awareness programs should be initiated to highlight the importance of children's rights, inclusive education, and psychosocial support, ensuring that all stakeholders are well-informed.
- Special support for children from marginalized families is essential. This may include the provision of school supplies, allowances, and nutrition programs as immediate assistance, along with long-term support initiatives targeted at guardians to strengthen their ability to promote child development.

### ***2. Enhancing Teacher Training and Policy Knowledge***

- Continuous training programs should be designed for teachers on inclusive teaching methods, rights-based education, and child psychology to strengthen policy implementation in classrooms.
- Modules on children's rights and inclusive education should be integrated into teacher training curricula and professional development syllabi.

### ***3. Reducing Rural–Urban Disparities***

- More resources should be allocated to rural schools to provide adequate classrooms, attractive teaching materials, and accessible reading resources. Awareness campaigns should also be conducted to engage parents in supporting children's education.
- Technology-enabled learning, such as digital content and multimedia classrooms, should be introduced to bridge the gap between rural and urban opportunities and ensure equal access for all children.

### ***4. Promoting Gender-Sensitive Initiatives***

- Child marriage remains a major challenge in rural areas. Local government representatives should be engaged to take strict measures against this practice. Safe transportation, scholarships for girls, awareness programs for parents, and secure school environments must be ensured.
- Women's participation in School Management Committees (SMCs) and Parent–Teacher Associations (PTAs) should be actively encouraged to strengthen gender inclusivity in educational governance.

### ***5. Strengthening Children's Participation and Voice***

- Although student councils exist in primary schools, they have not been fully institutionalized. These councils should be activated, and additional opportunities for children to express their views should be created, such as weekly children's forums.
- The introduction of “mini parliaments” within classrooms could provide a joyful and inclusive environment where every child is encouraged to share opinions and where all voices are equally valued.

### ***6. Fostering School–Community Cooperation***

- School authorities play a critical role in shaping inclusive environments. Strong collaboration among teachers, guardians, and SMC members is needed to ensure that all groups become active partners in school development.



- Families, communities, civil society organizations, and NGOs should be encouraged to complement government efforts by contributing to the implementation of children's rights and inclusive education.

## 7. Conclusion

Bangladesh has adopted progressive policies to promote children's rights and inclusive education, but their effective implementation remains constrained by socio-economic disparities, rural–urban divides, gender-based barriers, and weak policy enforcement, as evidenced by this study. The findings suggest that family income, parental education, geographical location, and prevailing social norms profoundly shape children's access to education and the realization of their rights. Inclusive education is critical for every child and cannot be achieved by schools alone; it requires coordinated action from families, teachers, communities, and policymakers. Listening to children's voices and respecting their opinions, raising awareness among parents, equipping teachers with inclusive education strategies, and addressing structural inequalities are essential steps toward this goal. In developing countries like Bangladesh, inclusive education must be transformed from a policy aspiration into a lived reality, where equality, dignity, and participation are ensured for every child. Only through such transformation will Bangladesh be able to fulfill its commitments to protecting children's rights, advancing inclusive education, and achieving sustainable social development.

## References:

1. Acharja, D. C., Chowdhury, K. Q., Akter, N., Das, R., Hossain, M. I., & Islam, M. T. Inclusive Education for Children from Marginal Groups in Bangladesh: Problems and Possibilities. *International Journal of Advance Research and Innovative Ideas in Education*, 7(2), 752-767.
2. Ahsan, M. T., Sharma, U., & Deppeler, J. M. (2012). Exploring Pre-Service Teachers' Perceived Teaching-Efficacy, Attitudes and Concerns about Inclusive Education in Bangladesh. *International Journal of whole schooling*, 8(2), 1-20.
3. Ainscow, M. (2003). Desarrollo de sistemas educativos inclusivos. *Las respuestas a las necesidades educativas especiales en una escuela vasca inclusiva*, 19-36.
4. Ainscow, M. (2005). Developing inclusive education systems: what are the levers for change?. *Journal of educational change*, 6(2), 109-124.
5. Ainscow, M., & Miles, S. (2009). Developing inclusive education systems: How can we move policies forward. *La educación inclusiva: de la exclusión a la plena participación de todo el alumnado*, 167-170.
6. .
7. Akbarovna, A. S. (2022). Inclusive education and its essence. *International Journal Of Social Science & Interdisciplinary Research ISSN: 2277-3630 Impact factor: 8.036*, 11(01), 248-254.
8. F. Antonak, R., & Livneh, H. (2000). Measurement of attitudes towards persons with disabilities. *Disability and rehabilitation*, 22(5), 211-224.
9. Begum, H. A., Perveen, R., Chakma, E., Dewan, L., Afroze, R. S., & Tangen, D. (2019). The challenges of geographical inclusive education in rural Bangladesh. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 23(1), 7-22.
10. Booth, T., & Ainscow, M. (1998). *From them to us* (pp. 148-123). London: Routledge.
11. Bourke, B. (2010). Experiences of black students in multiple cultural spaces at a predominantly white institution. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, 3(2), 126.



12. Creswell, J. W. (2015). Revisiting mixed methods and advancing scientific practices.
13. Dawson, C. (2019). *Introduction to research methods 5th edition: A practical guide for anyone undertaking a research project*. Hachette UK.
14. Felekidou, K., Howard, J., & Lenakakis, A. (2018). Play and inclusive education: Greek teachers' attitudes. *European Journal of Special Education Research*, 3(3), 129.
15. Fu, Y., Peng, H., Ou, L., Sabharwal, A., & Khot, T. (2023, July). Specializing smaller language models towards multi-step reasoning. In *International Conference on Machine Learning* (pp. 10421-10430). PMLR.
16. Hassanein, E. E., Alshaboul, Y. M., & Ibrahim, S. (2021). The impact of teacher preparation on preservice teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education in Qatar. *Heliyon*, 7(9).
17. Khan, A. H. M. N., Anisuzzaman, M., Rahman, N., & Choudhury, R. K. (2011). Children with disability in Bangladesh. *Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE)*, 1-41.
18. Kılıçgün, M. Y., & Oktay, A. (2013). Effect of Socio-Economic Situation on Attitudes of Parents for Children's Rights. *Middle Eastern & African Journal of Educational Research MAJER Issue*, 4.
19. Krischler, M., Powell, J. J., & Pit-Ten Cate, I. M. (2019). What is meant by inclusion? On the effects of different definitions on attitudes toward inclusive education. *European journal of special needs education*, 34(5), 632-648.
20. Lansdown, G. (2001). *Promoting children's participation in democratic decision-making* (No. innins01/9).
21. Malak, M. S., & Khanam, D. (2011). Challenges to regular schooling of female students with disabilities in Bangladesh: A case study. *Journal of Advanced Social Research*, 1(2), 147-156.
22. Malak, M. S., Begum, H. A., Habib, M. A., Shaila, M., & Roshid, M. M. (2013). Inclusive Education in Bangladesh: Policy and Practice. *Australian Association for Research in Education*.
23. Matubbar, S., & Arifuzzaman, M. (2022). Child Rights Violation Under the Human Rights of Bangladesh. *Available at SSRN 4146868*.
24. Menter, I. J., Hulme, M., & Elliot, D. (2011). A guide to practitioner research in education.
25. Mohajan, H.K. (2012a). Lack Of Consciousness of Child Rights in Bangladesh, Lambert Academic Publishing, Germany
26. Mohajan, Haradhan (2014): Child Rights in Bangladesh. *Journal of Social Welfare and Human Rights*, 2 (1), 207-238.
27. Mridha, M. A. A. (2018). Children's Rights and Our Responsibilities. *Bangladesh Journal of Child Health*, 42(2), 52-53.
28. Newby, P. (2014). *Research methods for education*. Routledge.
29. Nilholm, C., & Göransson, K. (2017). What is meant by inclusion? An analysis of European and North American journal articles with high impact. *European journal of special needs education*, 32(3), 437-451.
30. Nunez, R., & Rosales, S. (2021). Inclusive Education: Perceptions and attitudes among Filipino high school teachers. *The Asian ESP*, 17(6.1), 151-172.
31. Peverill, M., Dirks, M. A., Narvaja, T., Herts, K. L., Comer, J. S., & McLaughlin, K. A. (2021). Socioeconomic status and child psychopathology in the United States: A meta-analysis of population-based studies. *Clinical psychology review*, 83, 101933.
32. Pope, C., Ziebland, S., & Mays, N. (2000). Analysing qualitative data. *Bmj*, 320(7227), 114-116.



33. Powell, J. J., Edelstein, B., & Blanck, J. M. (2019). Awareness-raising, legitimization or backlash? Effects of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities on education systems in Germany. In *The Power of Numbers and Networks* (pp. 77-100). Routledge.
34. Ruiz-Casares, M., Collins, T. M., Tisdall, E. K. M., & Grover, S. (2017). Children's rights to participation and protection in international development and humanitarian interventions: Nurturing a dialogue. *The International Journal of Human Rights*, 21(1), 1-13.
35. Sen, B. (2003). Drivers Of Escape and Descent: Changing Household Fortunes in Rural Bangladesh. *World Development*, 31(3), 513-534.
36. Sinclair, M. F., Christenson, S. L., Lehr, C. A., & Anderson, A. R. (2003). Facilitating Student Engagement: Lessons Learned from Check & Connect Longitudinal Studies. *The California School Psychologist*, 8(1), 29-41.
37. Sinclair, R. (2004). Participation In Practice: Making It Meaningful, Effective and Sustainable. *Children & Society*, 18(2), 106-118.
38. Sinclair, R., & Franklin, A. (2000). A Quality Protects Research Briefing: Young People's Participation. *Department Of Health, Research in Practice and Making Research Count: London*.
39. Slee, R. (2006). Limits To and Possibilities for Educational Reform. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 10(02-03), 109-119.
40. Suchana, A. A. (2020). Investigating gender equity in a primary level English language textbook in Bangladesh. In *The Routledge handbook of English language education in Bangladesh* (pp. 298-311). Routledge.
41. Ulug, M., Ozden, M. S., & Eryilmaz, A. (2011). The Effects of Teachers' Attitudes on Students' Personality and Performance. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 30, 738-742.
42. UNESCO (2020). Global Education Monitoring Report: All Means All
43. Unesco. (1994). *The Salamanca Statement and Framework for action on special needs education: adopted by the World Conference on Special Needs Education; Access and Quality. Salamanca, Spain, 7-10 June 1994*. Unesco.
44. UNICEF (2020). <https://www.unicef.org/education/inclusive-education>
45. United Nations (2021). Gender Equality Brief. [https://Bangladesh.Un.Org/Sites/Default/Files/2024-05/Bd-C836-Gender-Equality-Brief\\_Bangladesh\\_2024\\_0.Pdf](https://bangladesh.un.org/sites/default/files/2024-05/Bd-C836-Gender-Equality-Brief_Bangladesh_2024_0.Pdf)
46. Nations, U. (1989). Convention on the Rights of the Child. *Geneva: Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights*.
47. Veerman, A. (1992). Diapause in phytoseiid mites: a review. *Experimental & applied acarology*, 14(1), 1-60.
48. Vilamor J, Bulat-Ag J. (2017) Negative Attitude of a Teacher. Retrieved From: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/321110811\\_Negative\\_Attitude\\_Of\\_A\\_Teacher](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/321110811_Negative_Attitude_Of_A_Teacher).
49. Vilaseca, R., Rivero, M., Ferrer, F., & Bersabé, R. M. (2020). Parenting behaviors of mothers and fathers of young children with intellectual disability evaluated in a natural context. *Plos one*, 15(10), e0240320.
50. Warren, K. (2019). *Administrative Law in the Political System: Law, Politics, and Regulatory Policy*. Routledge.





- 
51. WHO/UNICEF Joint Water Supply, & Sanitation Monitoring Programme. (2014). *Progress on drinking water and sanitation: 2014 update*. World Health Organization.