

Recommendations for Special Needs Education
in
the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan

March 2008

The Project on Strengthening Special Education in Afghanistan
Japan International Cooperation Agency

1. Background

Trani and Bakhshi (2006) estimate that 2.7% (550,000–650,000 people) of the entire population of Afghanistan are people (children) with disabilities, caused by damage from more than 20 years of war and land mines (Mohammad Alam Bayan, 2005) as well as natural and secondary causes. The recommendations of the “First Joint Seminar on the Development of Education for Children with Disabilities,” which was held at Kabul Education University by Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) in 2003, led the Ministry of Education (MoE) and Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) to recognize the significance and importance of special needs education, and in speaking to the National Assembly the Minister of Education at that time expressed the need for urgent efforts for special needs education. Since that time, in step with the international community, there has been growing awareness in Afghanistan that special needs education is essential to raising the level of education in the country overall.

Then the MoHE acknowledged the importance of special needs education, and in 2005 approved the establishment of a special needs education department at Kabul Education University, which is the central teachers training university in Afghanistan. Thus came into existence Afghanistan’s first university department to train teachers of special needs education.

However, there needed professional assistance to start the new department in terms of curriculum, professional knowledge, teaching materials. To improve the situation, in 2005 JICA implemented a project at Kabul Education University to improve education for children with disabilities. Although this project brought teacher training for special needs education in Afghanistan to the starting line, university instructors, curriculum, and teaching materials are still lacking, so conditions for a teacher training department

have not yet been met. Kabul Education University has therefore asked JICA to continue to share with it the experiences of teacher training in Japan. Having accepted this request, and in 2006 JICA started the project “Strengthening Special Education in Afghanistan.”

The Department of Special Needs Education at Kabul Education University currently has one dean and four instructors. There are 63 first-year students and 31 second-year students studying in the department, which offers major courses in education for people with visual disabilities, education for people with hearing disabilities, education for people with mental disabilities, and education for people with motor disabilities. In these programs, students will start in the third year to learn the skills and special knowledge in their respective special field. Kabul Education University’s Department of Special Needs Education has been assigning faculty, and with JICA’s support developing its curricula along these lines, and teaching materials are being prepared accordingly. So far three faculty members have received training at the University of Tsukuba’s Center for Research on International Cooperation in Educational Development (CRICED) through the JICA’s projects, in which they toured special needs education sites in Japan while also attending lectures in their field of specialty in special needs education. The reports and other materials prepared by these three faculty members have been used in university lectures upon their return to Afghanistan. With CRICED’s support, an introduction to special needs education, collection of teaching aids for special needs education in Japan, and an introduction to special needs education in Japan have been compiled and are being used in classes as textbooks on special needs education. CRICED has also provided teaching materials for hearing-impaired students and others, which have been used in special needs education

in Japan.

2. Recommendations

In 1993 the UN adopted the Standard Rules for the Equalization of Opportunities of Persons with Disabilities, and called for the realization of barrier-free societies. In 1994 the “World Conference on Special Needs Education: Access and Quality” was held in Salamanca, Spain, and the Salamanca Statement, in which an action platform was established to promote inclusive education in the schooling of children with special needs, was released. In 2002, the Biwako Millennium Framework was adopted at an ad hoc meeting of the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific. Ideas and goals included in this Framework are the central role played by people with disabilities themselves in efforts toward the UN Millennium Development Goals, the guarantee of human rights of people with disabilities, the promotion of early detection of disabilities and early education is promoted, and the realization of barrier-free societies.

As seen by the above, inclusive education for children with special needs is a global trend. It should also be advanced in Afghanistan. Inclusive education is a means to ensure the human rights of children with special needs, and to enable their full participation and equality in society. It also has the effect of bringing about improvements in the quality of school education overall. Afghanistan’s entire education system is currently developing, which presents an excellent opportunity—one that should be taken advantage of—to implement inclusive education in this development phase. In 2007 CRICED conducted a survey in Kabul on attitudes toward special needs education, and about 90% of the local population, school teachers, and university

students approved of school attendance for children with disabilities, from which we may also infer a very high awareness in society toward disabilities (Nakata, Mohammad Alam Bayan and Fukushima, 2007).

As the JICA project of Strengthening Special Education in Afghanistan is ending successfully at the end of March in 2008, we would like to present recommendations to Kabul Education University, the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE), and the Ministry of Education (MoE).

(1) Recommendations for the Department of Special Needs Education at Kabul Education University and MoHE

Permission was received from the MoHE in 2005 to establish a Department of Special Needs Education at Kabul Education University. Since that time, Department Dean Mohammed Alam Bayan and other staff have worked to set up a curriculum and are developing teaching materials. However many issues remain before the teacher training system is fully on track. These include a number of issues for the operation of the teacher training system at the university's Department of Special Needs Education. We would like to discuss some major issues, including recommendations, for the three outlooks of the short term (3 years), medium term (5 years), and long term (6 years and beyond).

1) Short-term issues

(I) Establishment of a committee for the development of texts and teaching materials

Department of Special Needs Education faculty members have written introductions to education of children with hearing and intellectual disabilities, and

some of these are used in lectures. Textbooks prepared with the support of JICA are also used. However, specialty textbooks for third year major students are lacking. Textbooks and teaching materials corresponding to the curriculum need to be developed urgently. In developing these textbooks and teaching materials, it is vital that they be compiled here independently in cooperation with teachers at schools for the blind and deaf and teachers at schools implementing inclusive education. Teachers' guides needed for classroom education should also be compiled. We would like to recommend the establishment of a textbook and teaching material development committee, which would include Dean Bayan and staff of the Department of Special Needs Education, teachers at schools for the blind, schools for the deaf, and inclusive schools, and instructors at other institutions. The opinions of as many as possible of the people involved in this field should be sought, and these people should be included in the group of authors. Using actual examples of instruction in the classroom, lesson plans, and the use of teaching materials, as well as indicating specific points to bear in mind, will likely make these materials favorites of teachers for classroom use. We suggest that regular meetings of the textbook and teaching material development committee be held, and that reports on the results of these meetings be sent to the MoHE and the MoE. Textbooks reflect the situation and trends in a society, and so regular textbook revision is desirable. While reference should be made to special needs education in other countries including Japan when developing and compiling textbooks and teaching materials, they should be developed and compiled with respect for the situation and unique culture of Afghanistan (Jones, 2007). Textbooks and other materials compiled by the committee should be submitted to the MoE, and the

Ministry's approval for publishing should be received. By continuously carrying out such activities, the Department of Special Needs Education will build its capacity as a central institution for universities nationwide. We believe that the independent development of textbooks and teaching materials by the people involved in special needs education in Afghanistan will form a cornerstone for national development (Spink, 2005).

(II) Establishment of career support committee

The first graduates will leave the university and enter the working world in 2010. It will be necessary to establish a career support committee for the career development of fourth year students, and prepare appropriate paths forward for graduates of the Department of Special Needs Education. As soon as possible, the career support committee should start to create a system that can provide consultation to students with regard to their future path, and support them in career development. Promising students should be given an opportunity to study in foreign countries, and given both physical and psychological support so that they can acquire a high level of specialty at the foreign graduate school where they study. It will also be essential to look at the training of personnel who will be needed by the Department of Special Needs Education in the future. Possible career paths for graduates are employment as civil servants (MoE and MoHE), university teachers, TTC teachers, school teachers, and employees of facilities for the disabled and rehabilitation centers.

(III) Establishment of teaching practice committee

Students who want to become teachers need to go through teaching practice at special needs schools or inclusive schools. Establishment of a committee to

investigate the selection of schools for this teaching practice as well as the practice curriculum, practice methods and time period, evaluation, and similar matters is an urgent task. The MoHE and the MoE should give full support to teaching practice, and fulfill their responsibility to train high quality professionals who can respond to the needs of children with disabilities.

(IV) Support for Teacher Training Colleges (TTC)

It is anticipated that graduates of Kabul Education University will be able to teach as professional educators at TTCs, which are under the jurisdiction of the MoE. Considering this, Kabul Education University should start work on creating a system to support TTCs in cooperation with the MoE. That support may include providing lectures in the field of special needs education conducted at TTCs, and the development of texts, teaching materials, teachers' guides and other materials for use at TTCs. An urgent task for Kabul Education University is to produce graduates who have acquired the competence to give lectures and guidance to students at TTCs. In addition, the MoE, in cooperation with Kabul Education University and TTCs, should actively provide training for in-service teachers.

(V) Strengthening research systems

A review needs to be made of the research topics that are essential to advancing special needs education in Afghanistan. The Department of Special Needs Education should consider what topics need to be studied and what kind of research and study needs to be conducted. It should then set annual targets, and hasten to create a system for joint research. As a first step it would be advisable to hold regular research or study meetings within the department, in order to improve the research capability of faculty. The first issue to be taken up by such a study

group is the compilation a glossary or dictionary related to special needs education and disability. English technical terms should be accurately translated into local languages, and the terms should be given in English and local languages together with a brief description. These terms should be consolidated as the official terms in special needs education in Afghanistan. The Department of Special Needs Education in Kabul Education University should be responsible for compilation, and the glossary will need to be disseminated nationwide. Subsequent projects are fact-finding surveys and research on children with disabilities; fact-finding surveys on disabled children enrolled at inclusive schools; surveys on the educational results and support systems of inclusive schools; surveys and research in conjunction with doctors on autism, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), learning disabilities, and learning difficulties; surveys of employment among people with disabilities; and surveys and research on the possibility of early detection of disabilities and early education. Coordination with the Ministry of Public Health (MoPH), and the Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs, Martyrs and Disability (MoLSAMD) will be essential in conducting these studies. Long term, it would be advisable to create developmental tests in collaboration with clinical psychologists, educational psychologists, and medical professionals. Precise research plans should be formulated before executing these surveys and studies. Applications should be then made to the relevant government agency and efforts should be made to obtain research funds.

2) Medium term issues

(I) Creating a university-affiliated school with school facilities constructed using grant aid from Japan

Kabul Education University has school facilities constructed with a grant aid from Japan. Currently, some of these facilities are being used as the Department of Special Needs Education. In the near future we look forward to seeing another part of these facilities developed as a university-affiliated inclusive school, which will be used as a teaching practice school while also serving as a model inclusive school for Afghanistan. To do this it will be necessary to consult with the MoE and discuss the possibilities for such a school, including facilities and equipment, staff, school buses, and a dormitory.

(II) Enhancing the University Library

The current library collection is estimated to be several thousand volumes. This collection is dominated by out-of-date technical books, and provides a poor learning environment for students. It will be essential to discuss and negotiate with the MoHE to try and purchase up to date books, academic journals, and audiovisual equipment based on a medium term outlook and plan. The MoHE should respond in good faith to the requests of Kabul Education University, as the major education university in Afghanistan, and comply with them wherever possible.

(III) Increasing the size of the teaching faculty

Special needs education covers not only visual disabilities, hearing disabilities, motor disabilities, and intellectual disabilities, but also autism, ADHD, learning disabilities, PTSD, and multiple disabilities. It is a diverse academic field with respective medical, psychological, educational, sociological, and welfare-related aspects associated with each of these disabilities. To further advance special needs education, early detection of disabilities and early education is essential. The

Department of Special Needs Education, in conjunction with the MoPH, hospitals, and local communities, needs to develop a concept for an early detection system for children with disabilities, and to establish an early education system. Under this concept, Kabul Education University should strengthen its cooperation with the MoPH and try to have at least one doctor and one clinical psychology specialist assigned to the Department of Special Needs Education while working to enhance the field of clinical education.

3) Long-term issues

(I) Hosting of international symposiums and creation of a special needs education association in Afghanistan

Taking a long-term view, it would be advisable for the Department of Special Needs Education at Kabul Education University to hold regular international symposiums, actively conduct research exchanges with international society, and make these results known throughout Afghan society. The Department should also create a domestic “Afghan Special Needs Education Association” (provisional name) and start work to build a system to support inclusive education while promoting scientific research on disabilities with the assembled wisdom of universities nationwide.

(II) Cooperation with the Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs, Martyrs and Disability (MoLSAMD)

The Department of Special Needs Education at Kabul Education University should cooperate with the MoLSAMD to promote the social participation of children and adults with disabilities. The MoLSAMD considers cooperation with the Department of Special Needs Education at Kabul Education University to be an

important activity (Turmusani, 2006), and the two parties should join together in actively working out an action plan to promote social participation of people with disabilities.

(III) Establishment of a disabled student support center

A center to support students with disabilities who are enrolled at the university; specifically a disabled student support center that is set up on campus, is another thing that needs to be considered. The MoHE should actively promote university admission of students with disabilities, and develop a concept to build a system that can support these students in their study and daily lives, in accordance with their situation and the severity of their disability.

(2) Prospects for the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE)

It is strongly hoped that the MoHE will listen to the voices of parents of children with disabilities, adults with disabilities, as well as the MoE, MoLSAMD, and MoPH, and work with each of these ministries to promote special needs education. Looking back historically, we see a trend in countries around the world, including Japan, for special needs education to be placed in an inferior position behind regular education, always receiving low priority and given secondary status. Today Afghanistan has a wonderful opportunity to act in line with the Salamanca Statement and other declarations for the proper development of its special needs education.

(3) Recommendations for the Ministry of Education (MoE)

1) Short-term Issues

The Ministry of Education, in its national education strategic plan (2007), announced the creation of 35 resource centers for children with disabilities by 2011. In this announcement, they said that not all children with disabilities would attend school at those resource centers, and that it was necessary to improve the physical environment of regular schools so that, to the extent possible, children with disabilities could attend regular schools. At the same time, special training for the teachers of these children and the preparation of appropriate curricula are needed. A point that should be noted is that the Ministry is planning to make it so that children with severe disabilities, for example total blindness, deafness, or multiple disabilities, can study at the resource centers. To do that they are planning to assign teachers who have received special training. Even if this plan is realized, however, the school attendance rate of children with disabilities is predicted to be 45% of boys and 30% of girls by 2011. Plans for the construction of 35 resource centers and assignment of appropriate teachers seems generally reasonable looking only at present conditions, but from the viewpoint of the government's fiscal situation one wonders about the feasibility of these plans.

Meanwhile, the establishment of 18 coeducational teacher training colleges (TTC) with dormitories to train teachers who will staff the resource centers is being planned nationwide. Together with this, construction of 364 in-service teacher training facilities and 36 buildings to house administrative offices is being planned. For the resource centers and teacher training centers to function properly, not only financial support but also the support of the Department of Special Needs Education in Kabul Education University will be essential. The Department of Special Needs Education in Kabul Education University will fulfill a huge role in developing the

curricula and teaching materials for these two centers, and providing lectures. Because universities are under the jurisdiction of the MoHE, they should not be excluded from the future conception of school education, and the MoHE together with the Department of Special Needs Education in Kabul Education University should investigate the future overall conception of special needs education. In addition, subjects on special needs education should be included as required subjects in the curricula designed at the TTCs, so that all TTC students take them. If this is done, TTC graduates will have a better understanding of inclusive schools to which they may be assigned after graduation, and will be more likely to serve as driving forces for inclusive education. The MoE should place the field of special needs education on the same level as other fields in TTCs, and with the support of the Department of Special Needs Education in Kabul Education University dedicate efforts to training teachers with a high level of expertise. With regard to the MoE's plan to set up resource centers and TTCs, started in 2007, it will be difficult to train quality teachers with high levels of expertise by 2011 without the cooperation of the MoHE and the Department of Special Needs Education in Kabul Education University. This is a short-term plan, and therefore these organizations and corporative frameworks should be studied immediately.

2) Medium-term Issues

In the medium term, a national survey of students with disabilities and a survey on school attendance should be conducted by the MoE together with the Department of Special Needs Education in Kabul Education University, the MoPH, MoLSAMD. Because proper teacher placement can be investigated based on the results of these surveys, it would be a good idea to plan for the establishment of a

committee to conduct these surveys cross-sectionally across organizations. A teacher training system should also be planned for teachers who have graduated from a TTC, and an annual budget should be allocated. Training will be conducted for teachers with teaching experience of 3, 5, and 10 years by the staff of the Department of Special Needs Education in Kabul Education University. This accumulated training will help to raise the quality of teachers. Moreover, the MoE should encourage parents of children with disabilities to form and be active in groups that can share information beyond community or place. Encouraging these kinds of support and activities will help to raise understanding and awareness of disability in society.

We would also like to make one more recommendation for the medium term outlook. That is for the effective use of classrooms in the four buildings constructed at Kabul Education University with grant aid from Japan. Currently, some of those classrooms are being used as lecture rooms for the university's Department of Special Needs Education. The remaining classrooms should be approved for use as a university-affiliated school that can support education as a model school for all of Afghanistan. This university-affiliated school should be equipped with advanced facilities and assigned high quality teachers to serve as a model for inclusive schools nationwide. The lesson plans, instruction methods, and teaching materials that are developed at the university-affiliated school can be made available to teachers nationwide, and the lessons themselves made open for observation, so that the school serves as a place of shared resources. Students of the university will also be able to practice teaching in the school, and university faculty can conduct joint research together with teachers in the classrooms. It is advisable that a university professor serve concurrently as the principal of the affiliated school. Japanese

teacher training universities have affiliated schools, and close cooperative relationships are built between the university and school classrooms with a university faculty member also holding the position of school principal.

In addition, there are also children with moderate or severe disabilities that prevent them from receiving inclusive education. To provide schooling for children with moderate or severe disabilities, we would like to propose to the MoE that special schools be constructed. Special needs education does not consist of inclusive education only. In this sense, the construction of special schools for children who are excluded from inclusive education is essential. If school construction is difficult, the Ministry should consider using one classroom of inclusive schools as a special class for the schooling of children with moderate or severe disabilities, and assign specially trained teachers to those classes. Inclusive education should not be rigidly understood as placement in a regular class; the new method of special classes should be added to the Ministry's list of items to be considered.

3) Long-term Issues

In the long term there is a need to consider, in conjunction with the MoPH and MoSLAMD, measures to promote participation in society by people with disabilities. To enhance resource centers so that they meet the needs of the community, it will be necessary to give existing resource centers additional functions as vocational education sites, rehabilitation centers, and centers for early detection of disability and early intervention counseling with staff physicians. They should also have small-scale community centers or workshops for people with disabilities after they graduate from school, to assure them a path forward after graduation. Here again, cooperation with the MoLSAMD will be needed. To attract international attention to

policies for people with disabilities in Afghanistan, it will also be necessary to invite international conferences and other events related to people with disabilities, to make people around the world aware of the situation of people with disabilities in Afghanistan, as well as examples of improvement.

References

- Jones, A. M. E. (2007): Muslim and Western Influences on School Curriculum in Post-War Afghanistan. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*, 27(1), 27-40.
- Mohammad Alam Bayan (2005): Characteristics of Afghan Children Disabled during the War: Implication for Special Educational Provisions. Program Report by Visiting Foreign Research Fellows. CRICED University of Tsukuba, Japan.
- Nakata, H., Mohammad Alam Bayan and Fukushima, T. (2007): A Questionnaire Survey on Education for Children with Disabilities in Kabul, Afghanistan. JICA Report.
- Spink, J. (2005): Education and Politics in Afghanistan: the Importance of an Educational System in Peacebuilding and Reconstruction. *Journal of Peace Education*, 2(2), 195-207.
- The Ministry of Education (2007): National Education Strategic Plan. "By 2020 all children in Afghanistan, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary education." Afghanistan's MDGs for Education. Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.
- Trani, J-F. and Bakhshi, P. (2006): Understanding the Challenges Ahead. Executive Summary Report. National Disability Survey in Afghanistan 2005. Handicap International. www.handicap-international.org

Turmusani, M. (2006): Disability Policy Development in Afghanistan. Asian Research Service, Canada.