

**MOVING TOWARDS INCLUSION:**  
**A CASE STUDY OF ONE URBAN**  
**SCHOOL IN THE MALDIVES**

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by Badhoora Naseer

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**T**houghts

**H**ard work

**E**xtra perseverance

**S**o much work

**I**nterest

**S**leepless nights

## **Abstract**

The importance of developing inclusive education has been emphasized in previous research and various international documents. Inclusive education is not only promoted on the basis of human rights, but also as a means to improve and achieve quality education for all.

This case study explores and documents the development of inclusive education in one urban school in the Maldives. It focuses on the steps taken to move the school towards inclusion, the practices and experiences of different stakeholders involved in the process, and the factors that influenced inclusive education in the school.

Qualitative data was collected through interviews with some of the key members of the school community and through classroom observations and documents. Findings have revealed that the development of inclusive education in the school came about through a school leader rather than policies. In spite of recognized efforts towards inclusion, a range of exclusionary practices was still observed. Various impediments constrained the development of inclusive education, including, lack of collaboration between the SEN (Special Educational Needs) and the general staff, limited knowledge, awareness and positive understanding about inclusion, scarcity of

resources and support services. Factors such as large classes, undifferentiated curriculum, and rigid time tables also negatively affected the developmental process.

Findings indicate the complexity of developing inclusive education. The findings also suggest that changes on the societal level, in the education ministry and, in the school and classroom level could help sustain the development of inclusive education. The factors that could contribute to the development of inclusive education at these levels are discussed, as are the implications for the successful development of inclusive education in schools.

## **Chapter One: Introduction**

One of the growing concerns across the globe is the large number of students who are denied access to the education system and those who are in the system but are excluded from meaningful participation (Singal, 2008). To address this issue, adopting inclusive education as a strategy has been encouraged in international documents such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action (UNESCO, 1994). Influenced by these documents, there is currently a global trend for inclusive education. The philosophy of inclusive education is that all members of a community have the right to access and participate in education on an equal basis (Armstrong, 2011).

Inclusive education is a complex process that requires change at four levels: the broader society, education system, school and the classroom (Mitchell, 2010). However, there is a general consensus among researchers that the focus should be on developing inclusive schools (Ainscow, 2005; UNESCO, 1994). Many factors necessary for developing inclusive schools have been discussed (Mitchell, 2008; UNESCO, 2003); however, there is still a need to better understand the process that is involved in developing inclusive schools (Singal, 2008) and this is the focus of this study.

## **1.1 Purpose of the study**

This study explores the development of inclusive education in one school in the Maldives. Like other countries, Maldives is moving towards inclusive education. A variety of initiatives is currently under study and/or in the process of implementation. Much attention has been given to providing free education for all the children in the Maldives, achieving gender parity in providing access to education and universalizing primary education. More recently, steps have been taken to provide educational opportunities for students with SEN (Ministry of Education, 2008).

Despite these efforts, out of 2,250 children with disabilities in the Maldives, only 230 were enrolled in schools in 2009 and those who attend face barriers to learning and participation and are not adequately supported (Human Rights Commission of the Maldives, 2010). In addition, students with SEN remain one of the most vulnerable groups in the country and the government recognizes the need to increase educational opportunities for these students.

The majority of the students with severe special needs would be included within the policy framework. However, special attention needs to be given to the children with moderate to mild special educational needs. These students are in our mainstream education system and special attention needs to be given to train our teachers to cater to these students in the mainstream classes. Moreover, strategies and policies

need to be put in place to make sure that these children do not get lost in the system and become victims of the system. (Ministry of Education, 2008, p. 101)

Therefore, researching the development of inclusive education in schools and the related implications for key stakeholders is necessary to improve the schools' accessibility for all learners, provide appropriate support and to ensure full participation. A study of this nature is also important as there is a gap in the literature exploring the process of developing inclusive education (Singal, 2008). More importantly, the lack of research in the field of inclusive education in the Maldives at a time when the country is moving towards inclusion makes this study significant. "As the interventions in the area of inclusive education are at a nascent stage, no major gaps in implementation have been noticed" (Ministry of Education, 2008, p. 57). This study may have some implications for policy and practice about inclusive education in the country. Furthermore, as it provides empirical evidence on inclusive education in the Maldives, the study's completion is timely and important.

This study also has implications for my own practice as a teacher educator. The idea of this study originated from my desire to understand how teachers could be better prepared for inclusive schools / classrooms.

Given the importance of inclusive education, the gap in the literature, as well as my personal interest in the topic, a case study was carried out in one urban school in the Maldives, with the aim of exploring and documenting the development of inclusive education in the school.

The study is guided by the following questions

- How do the school leaders and teachers make sense of inclusive education?
- What steps were taken to move the school towards inclusion?
- How does inclusive education look in one class in the school?
- What factors influenced the development of inclusive education in the school?

## **1.2 The research context-Maldives**

The Republic of Maldives is a small island nation of 1192 islands, formed by a double chain of 26 atolls, located in the Indian Ocean. It stands in the Laccadive Sea about 700 kilometers south-west of Sri Lanka and 400 kilometers south-west of India. The atolls encompass a territory spread over roughly 90,000 square kilometers (35,000 sq m), making it one of the world's most geographically dispersed countries. Its population of 328,536 inhabits 200 of its islands with one



third of the population occupying the capital, Male'. Maldivians share the same language (Dhivehi), religion (Islam) and culture.

The recent disability prevalence rates show that 8.1 percent of the population has either temporary or permanent disabilities, and men with disabilities outnumber women. The most common types of disabilities noted in the Maldives are visual impairment, speech impairment and mental illness (Human Rights Commission of the Maldives, 2010). In the Maldives, disability is a sensitive issue parents and communities often do not want to publicly acknowledge (Ministry of Education, 2008).

### **1.1.1 Education in the Maldives**

Maldives has a centralized, national, bureaucratic system with the Ministry of Education (MoE) responsible for education of primary and secondary levels (Mohamed, 2006). MoE sets all the guidelines and monitors education services provided by both public and private education providers including schools and tuition classes. In addition, the responsibility for all the recurrent and capital costs for government schools and subsidies for private schools lies with MoE. Other responsibilities of MoE include; curriculum, teacher recruitment, in-service development, preparation of textbooks for primary level, school infrastructure, school and teacher supervision, school governance, public examinations (Mohamed, 2006).

In the Maldives, education began with one-on-one religious teaching by religious leaders in their homes. Traditionally, education took place in three types of educational institutions, “Edhuruge”, “Makthab” and “Madharusa” which were privately owned and usually self financed. These traditional educational institutions have contributed towards achieving many educational objectives such as a high rate of literacy and the preservation of national culture and tradition (Ministry of Education, 2008).

In 1960, a public school system with English medium schools that were patterned after the English system in the organization of curriculum and methods of instruction was introduced in Male’. However, the atolls continued to have the traditional education system until the policy shift to universalize primary education in 1978.

Schooling in the Maldives is structured on a 7-3-2 cycle-seven years of elementary schooling followed by three years of junior secondary school studies and two years of senior secondary school studies. At the end of the 3-year junior secondary cycle and the 2-year senior secondary cycle, students sit the London EDEXCEL GCE Ordinary-level and Advanced-level examinations respectively.

In the Maldives, schooling is provided by government, private and community sectors. Currently, the Maldives spends 15% to 20% of its income on education

(Ministry of Education, 2008) and focuses on improving the quality of elementary and secondary education for students from all the regions, including students with SEN (Department of National Planning, 2009).

### **Education of students with SEN**

Children with SEN were out of the public education domain until 1985, when education for students with hearing impairment began in a separate class in one primary school in the capital. More recently, in 2006, the government started establishing SEN units with a vision to set up at least one in each atoll by 2010 (Ministry of Education, 2008). Currently, there are 11 schools with SEN units in the country, out of which three are in Male' and eight are in different atolls. Except in the SEN unit for students with hearing impairment, in these units, education is based on individual ability instead of following the standard national curriculum (Human Rights Commission of the Maldives, 2010).

### **1.1.2 Some factors that support inclusive education in Maldives**

#### **International commitments**

Maldives signed the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in October, 2007 and has become the 85th United Nations member state to formally accept the obligations contained in the treaty. In addition, Maldives has signed-up

to eight of the nine core United Nations human rights instruments. These include: International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ratified on 19/09/2006); International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ratified on 19/09/2006); Convention on the Rights of the Child (ratified on 11/02/1991); Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (accessed to on 01/07/1993). It is also a member of the Biwako Millennium Framework for Action towards an Inclusive, Barrier-free and Rights-based Society for Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific (Human Rights Commission of the Maldives, 2010).

### **National commitments**

The constitution of the Maldives protects the rights of persons with disabilities in the country. According to Article 17, everyone including those with mental or physical disabilities is entitled to the rights and freedoms without any kind of discrimination.

In addition, a national disability policy was ratified on 9th July 2010 which is heavily based on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability. The bill protected rights of persons with disabilities and promises financial assistance for them. It also requires the establishment of special education centers for disabled students and for state schools to have facilities for the disabled to ensure that no disabled person is denied an education.

The Department of National Planning (2009) also has plans and strategies that support inclusive education. According to it, one of the important aims of the government is to ensure equitable access to quality education as basic human rights to students from all regions, including children with SEN. The planned strategic interventions to implement the policy are: develop a Special Education Needs Policy; establish a mechanism to identify children with special needs for early intervention; providing equitable access to educational opportunities for children with special needs; and strengthen the monitoring mechanism of inclusive programs to ensure effective program implementation.

Furthermore, the issues of children and adults with disabilities are also covered extensively in the 7th National Development Plan. Within this context, and in light of requests from the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, the Ministry of Gender and Family has introduced an action plan to improve rights for children with disabilities in Maldives. The main objectives of the Action Plan for Children with Disabilities are:

- To ensure all children with disabilities have equal access to education in either a specialist unit or through the mainstream system.
- To promote a positive attitude towards inclusive education amongst parents, teachers and children.

- To ensure that schools are adequately resourced to meet the needs of children with disabilities and those teachers have received the appropriate training on how to educate children with disabilities who have special educational needs.
- To raise awareness amongst parents and teachers of the abilities of children with disabilities and the importance of education for them.
- To ensure the new outcomes-based syllabus applies equally to children with disabilities and is suitable for use in SEN units.

(Ministry of Gender and Family, 2008, pp. 24-25)

Apart from the above policies, a national inclusion policy is at its final stage of being endorsed by the Minister of Education. This policy contains ways, means and responsibilities of the education sector in educating children who are marginalized, at risk and with disabilities. It also contains basic guidelines to consider in any class when educating children with different disabilities (Ministry of Education, 2010b). Additionally, the national curriculum that is currently under reform also encourages inclusive education by stressing the importance of catering for students' individual needs through modifications to the curriculum and incorporation of a variety of teaching strategies. According to the Education

Development Centre (2011) all schools will be teaching the new curriculum by 2015.

More recently, in 2010, a new school evaluation system that requires schools to be inclusive has been introduced (Ministry of Education, 2010a). According to the Minister of Education, “the five dimensions in this document will facilitate every child the right to acquire a relevant, varied and interesting education, and the schools to address the total needs of the child as a learner, inclusive of children with special educational needs and children at risk” (Ministry of Education, 2010a).

### **1.1.3 Some factors that challenge inclusive education in Maldives**

Despite the commitment towards inclusive education, some factors challenging inclusive education in the country still exist (Human Rights Commission of the Maldives, 2010; Ministry of Education, 2008). They include:

a) Lack of early detection and intervention for children with SEN: According to the Human Rights Commission (2010) there is no evidence of early detection and intervention arrangements in the country. They also argue that due to this, students with SEN experience environmental and social barriers that limit their participation in self care, play and education. One such example they provided is,

“a recent screening exercise in a school identified a child enrolled in a school who had not expressed a single word in the four years spent in school (verbal communication). However, the class teachers had not reported or taken any intervention initiatives" (p, 63).

b) Limited opportunities for education: Although provision of SEN has begun, this has only been established in six atolls out of the twenty atolls. Additionally, factors such as the curriculum and, lack of support and resources available in schools limit educational opportunities for students with SEN. As a result, nine out of ten children with SEN do not attend school, while students with physical disabilities who are enrolled in schools have limited access to library, laboratory, school office and toilets. The students with SEN who are enrolled in schools attend special classes and are not mainstreamed (Human Rights Commission, 2010).

c) Lack of teacher training: Due to resource constraints, teacher education in the Maldives has not been able to keep pace with the rapid expansion of the education sector (Ministry of Education, 2008) . Therefore, 59% of pre-school teachers, 36% of primary teachers, and 15% of lower secondary teachers employed in 2005 were untrained (Ministry of Education, 2008). Additionally, as teacher training on special education had not been a priority, most of the teachers are not adequately prepared to teach students with SEN. According to Ministry of Education (2008),



one of the main challenges for the education sector in enhancing inclusive education is the scarcity of human resource capacity.

d) Negative teacher attitudes: Due to the lack of training in teaching and influenced by the attitudes of parents and society at large, teachers are reluctant to accept students with physical and mental impairments (The Human Rights Commission, 2010). They also found that “getting teachers to respect and protect the rights of children with disabilities is a major challenge” (p, 64).

### **1.3 Organization of the thesis**

This thesis is organized into six chapters. Chapter one is the introduction, which provides an overview of the research and its purpose. It also briefly describes the research context (Maldives) with particular reference to education of students with SEN and factors relating to inclusive education in the country. In Chapter two, the literature related to this study is reviewed. It discusses literature on the international movement towards inclusive education, theories related to inclusive education, concept of inclusive education, developing inclusive education, in particular inclusive schools and barriers and facilitators to inclusive education. Chapter three describes the methodology and methods used for the study. It specifies the research design, sample, data collection methods and data analysis procedure that were adopted for the study. Chapter four presents the findings of

the study from the school as a whole and in one class. The research findings are discussed in relation to literature in Chapter five, using Bronfenbrenner's ecological framework as a conceptual organizer for the discussion followed by a discussion on the limitations of the research. Finally, Chapter six concludes this thesis, by discussing the implications of the study and providing suggestions for policy and practice.

## **Chapter two: Literature Review**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents an overview of literature related to the study. The review begins with a description of how, internationally, education of students with SEN began and the education provisions that were available then. This is followed by a discussion of the international movement towards inclusive education, highlighting the documents that led to the strategy. The chapter then discusses the theories of inclusive education and the debate that is created as a result. After that, the conception of inclusive education is summarized. Next, it proceeds to examine and discuss developing inclusive education and inclusive schools in particular, followed by a section on developing inclusive education in less developed countries. This chapter closes with a brief summary.

A literature search was conducted using the databases such as Proquest, EBSCO, Google Scholar and ERIC, using the keywords “inclusion”, “inclusive education”, developing inclusive education, inclusive schools and other similar terms.

## **2.2 The beginning of education for students with SEN**

Special schools that began in the 19th century for students with a sensory, intellectual or severe disability were the beginning of education for students with SEN. These schools that often took place in segregation, in residential settings were dominated by medical and charitable models of disability, and the aim was care instead of education (Foreman, 2008). This was because, then, many children were considered ineducable and formal education was not seen as appropriate for these children (Foreman, 2008; Graham-Matheson, 2012).

However, behavioural learning theories by Skinner, Pavlov and Jerome Bruner demonstrated that all children can learn and this led to a new understanding of special education (Garner, 2009). At the same time, there were arguments that were centered on the negative consequences from segregation. According to Westwood and Graham (as cited Oluremi, 2012) , one of the main arguments was that segregation fails to consider students with SEN as part of the community and society. Realizing the shortcomings of segregation, ‘desegregation’, ‘Regular Education Initiative’, ‘integration’, ‘mainstreaming’ and ‘inclusion’ were some of the means by which students with SEN got the opportunity to study in general education classrooms (Phyllis, White, Fauske, & Carr, 2011). Currently, inclusive

education has become one of the most dominant issues in the education of students with SEN (Mitchell, 2010).

## **2.3 International movement towards inclusive education**

Inclusive education is promoted on the basis of social justice, individual rights, the rights to equal access, non-discrimination and social opportunity (Winzer, 2009). The first influential document that led to international understanding and commitment to inclusive education was the Convention on the Right of the Child (UN, 1989). Article 23 of the Convention states that children should be educated in a way that allows them to achieve their fullest possible social integration and individual development. Additionally, Articles 3,6,12,28 and 29 of the Convention supports the development of inclusive education for all students with SEN (UN, 1989).

Another international document that was issued concerning the education of all disabled children was the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action (UNESCO, 1994). This framework was underpinned by the principle that mainstream schools should accommodate all children, irrespective of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic and other conditions. The Salamanca Statement also calls on governments to adopt the principle of inclusive

education, enrolling all children in regular schools unless there are necessary reasons for doing otherwise. Article 2 of the Salamanca Statement proposes that regular schools with this inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all (UNESCO, 1994).

The Salamanca Statement is arguably the most significant international document in the field of special education. The statement has been widely endorsed by education systems in many developed countries and developing countries (Ainscow & Cesar, 2006)

## **2.4 Theories of inclusive education**

The psycho-medical, the sociological and organizational paradigms dominate inclusive education theory (Skidmore, 2004). These are the paradigms or models of SEN, upon which educational provisions for students with SEN are based (Mitchell, 2010).

The psycho-medical paradigm which was predominant in the 1950s and 1960's, attributes difficulties to the individual child. This paradigm places children's differences and disabilities in their individual pathology and disabilities are seen as deficits within children that needed medical treatment in order to intervene or cure the deficit (Thomas & Loxley, 2007). This view of disability continues to

influence policy and practice in special education and favors segregation as the method of education for students with SEN (Halinen & Jarvinen, 2008). A summary of the medical model can clearly be seen in the definition by Mason (as cited in Jones, 2004). He defined the medical model as seeing disability as:

a medical problem, belonging to the individual concerned, which needs treating, curing or at least ameliorating. It is fundamental to the philosophy of segregation which separates young children from each other on the basis of their medical diagnosis, and then designs a curriculum which is aimed at 'normalising' the child as far as possible.  
(p. 10)

In contrast to the psycho-medical paradigm, the sociological paradigm shifts the focus of attention from the individual to the external factors such as barriers in the community, work place or school. The key movement of this perspective was social construction (Clough, 2000). This paradigm views that special needs are socially constructed but not independent of the external factors (C. A. Jones, 2004). Therefore, one critique of the medical paradigm is that it does not consider the environment and the factors from the environment such as the way schools are structured, and how communications evolve in the classroom all of which have the potential to affect educational progress (Michailakis & Reich, 2009). Additionally, Michailakis and Reich stressed that learning difficulties also result

from factors such as curriculum, competence of the teacher, and the resources available.

In the organizational paradigm, disability is seen as resulting from inappropriate school organizations or characteristics of mainstream schools (Mitchell, 2010). Clark, Dyson, Millward and Robson (1999) argue that students' difficulties in learning arise not from deficits in them but due to inappropriate responses to their needs from the schools themselves. For instance, they believe when organizations demand teachers to work individually on routines that allow them little flexibility, teachers are less likely to develop the flexible problem solving strategies that enable them to respond to the diverse needs of students in their class. Clark et al.,(1999) went on to argue that these types of organizations tend to favor more-or-less special education provisions because these allow them to deal with the most problematic forms of diversity without disrupting the existing routines. Therefore, they concluded that, "the whole apparatus of special education, therefore, is a means not of responding to students' real 'needs' but of preserving the comfort and stability of the mainstream education system" (p. 158).

The organizational paradigm was influenced by research on school effectiveness and is related to the notion of 'inclusive school' (Skidmore, 2004). This paradigm demands instructional techniques and learning opportunities to be structured in a way that responds to all learners (Mitchell, 2010).



The above discussed paradigms of disability play an important role in shaping the views and practices of inclusive education. For instance, in a study done in two English high schools that were developing more inclusive provision, Skidmore (2002) observed that teachers had two different forms of pedagogical discourses to explain how they view the educability of students, explain student's failure, and make choices of curriculum models. These represented contrasting models of disability. Skidmore called them the discourse of deviance and the discourse of inclusion. The discourse of deviance fits the medical model of disability while the discourse of inclusion adopts the social and organization model. The table below details the two forms of pedagogical discourse.

*Table 1: The two forms of pedagogical discourse*

<b><u>Dimension</u></b>	<b><u>Discourse of deviance</u></b>	<b><u>Discourse of inclusion</u></b>
Educability of students	There is a hierarchy of cognitive ability on which students can be placed	Every student has an open-ended potential for learning
Explanation of education failure	The source of difficulties lies in deficits of ability which are attributes of the students	The source of difficulties in learning lies in sufficiently responsive representation of the curriculum

School response	Support for learning should seek to remediate the weakness of individual students	Support for learning should seek to reform curriculum and develop pedagogy across the school
Theory of teaching expertise	Expertise in teaching centers in the possession of specialist subject knowledge	Expertise in teaching centers in engendering the active participation of all students in the learning process
Curriculum model	An alternative curriculum should be provided for the less able	A common curriculum should be provided for all students

Source: Skidmore (2002, p.120)

These findings by Skidmore suggest that inclusive education requires a reformed concept of disability and education failure. This is supported by other researchers (Booth & Ainscow, 2002; Carrington, 1999; Slee & Allan, 2001). These different theories have created a debate in the field of inclusive education.

### **2.4.1 Inclusion debate**

Even after many years of discussion around inclusive education, a debate remains among full inclusionists and partial inclusionists, who critique full inclusion (Deng, 2010). This debate is around the practice of full inclusion or a range of alternative placement options for students with SEN, from segregated to integrated special education settings (Zaretsky, 2005).

Ainscow (2005) could be characterized as a ‘full inclusionist’. These researchers advocate for a unified education system where all students are accommodated and their diverse needs are met. This aligns with the organizational paradigm, in which schools change for everyone by implementing effective teaching strategies, operating as problem-solving organizations and supporting teachers in the change process (Mitchell, 2010).

On the other hand, Powell and Tutt (2007) contend that separate settings can better protect the rights of students with SEN, when placed in settings that respond to their particular needs. They make the argument, “if children are to have equality of opportunity then they may need access to appropriate specialist attention (e.g. specialist teaching), which is most effectively, for them, delivered in an appropriate specialist setting” (p. 44). This view of Powell and Tutt represents the medical paradigm in which disabilities are seen as resulting from difficulties in individual children who may benefit from special instructions given in special settings.

Karten (2011) argues for a continuum of services. In his critique of full inclusion he says “inclusion is a great idea, if properly implemented but should not be considered as the only option if the child’s academic and social needs are not being met by placement in the general classroom” (p. 23). Likewise, Michailakis and Reich (2009) argue that the idea of “one school for all” and the vision of

inclusion are illusionary. The view of a continuum of services is based on the assumptions of both the medical and sociological paradigms of disability. The range of educational settings from most restricted to least restricted as stated by (Foreman, 2008) are as follows:

- Residential schools for students with a disability
- Separate special day school
- Separate special school on regular campus
- Special unit (usually two or three classes) located in regular school
- Single special class in regular school
- Single special class in regular school, with part time – regular placement
- Regular class

However, for some researchers, such as Heward (as cited in Wong-Ratcliff & Kwok Keung, 2011), it is not the place that is important, but the quality of instruction is what matters.

## **2.5 Conceptualization of inclusive education**

Inclusion is a complex term with variety of meanings and interpretations that has implications at national, local and school level (Walsh & Hall, 2010). In general,

inclusion refers to being accepted as part of a group, organization, or two-person relationship (Levine & Hogg, 2010). In the educational context, inclusion means that every child should be a valued member of the school community and none of the students should be marginalized, alienated, humiliated, teased, rejected or excluded (Forlin, 2010). However, within the inclusive education literature inclusion has been perceived and defined in different ways.

At the most basic level, inclusive education is understood as educating learners with SEN in regular education settings (Mitchell, 2008). This understanding of inclusion is closely related to integration and currently viewed as a traditional interpretation of inclusion. Mitchell contrasted inclusion with integration or mainstreaming by arguing that inclusion is more than merely integrating students with SEN into the general classes. Similarly, other researchers have discussed critical differences between the two. These include integration involving students attending special classes or resource rooms for support (Marschark, Young, & Lukomski, 2002), students being placed in a general class only for subjects they are more prepared for (Karten, 2011), and students requiring to ‘fit’ into the existing arrangements (Garner, 2009); while inclusion is about placing all students in the general class with support arranged within the classroom and changing the culture and ethos of a school for everyone (Marschark et al., 2002).

A broader interpretation of inclusive education is including all learners of the school community who face barriers to their meaningful participation (Ballard, 2004). This interpretation of inclusion moves away from the sole association with children with SEN to include everybody. Thomas and Loxley (2007) argue that inclusion is more than special needs education that emerges from learning difficulties or disabilities but valuing equally children's difficulties that may arise from factors such as language, family income, cultural origin, gender and ethnic origin. More recently, inclusive education is increasingly understood internationally as a reform that welcomes diversity among all learners and supports every child to learn successfully. According to this broadened conceptualization, 'inclusive education is an ongoing process aimed at offering quality education for all while respecting diversity and the different needs and abilities, characteristics and all forms of discrimination' (UNESCO, 2009, p. 126).

## **2.6 Developing inclusive education**

Developing inclusive education is a complex process because "it calls into question the broader aims of education, the purpose of schools, the nature of the curriculum, approaches to assessment, and schools' accommodation to diversity" (Mitchell, 2010, p. 121). It also requires an educational change in the school, the whole education system and commitment at the national level (UNESCO, 2003).

This is because inclusive education implies that learning difficulties result from complex intersection of factors external to the students themselves such as curriculum, school organization, teachers' readiness to respond to diversity and ways in which differences are viewed and processed by the society (Michailakis and Reich, 2009).

Ainscow (2005) also asserted that a range of contextual influences affect the development of inclusion in schools, some of which may provide support and encouragement while other times they can act as barriers to progress. According to Ainscow, these influences relate to: the principles that guide policy priorities within an education system; the views and actions of others within the local context; and the criteria that are used to evaluate the performance of schools. Therefore, in summarizing his view, he noted:

Developments within individual schools are more likely to lead to a sustainable development if they are part of a process of systematic change. In other words, inclusive school development has to be seen in relation to wider factors that may help or hinder progress. (p. 117)

Mitchell (2010) pointed out that, in developing inclusive education, attention should be paid to three levels: the broad society and education system, the school and the classroom. He further discussed the factors that influence education at each of these levels.

*Table 2: Factors from different levels that influence the development of inclusive education.*

<u>Societal and education system level.</u>	<u>School level</u>	<u>Classroom level</u>
<p>The policy context of the wider community</p> <p>collaboration between government agencies and between them and non-government organizations,</p> <p>collaboration among educators, parents, peers, other school personnel, and community agency personnel</p>	<p>the values and attitudes held by staff</p> <p>leadership and decision-making</p> <p>support networks</p>	<p>student- centered pedagogy</p> <p>collaboration between regular class teachers and a range of other people, including specialist teachers, teaching assistants, therapists, and parents</p>

The above discussion suggests that inclusive education is influenced by factors at different levels that are nested one inside the other. Inclusive education takes place in a class inside a school, embedded in the education ministry, which is part of the society. Therefore, when researching the development of inclusive education, Bronfenbrenner’s ecological framework is useful. This framework recognizes that development is influenced by several environmental systems that are like a set of concentric circles, nested one inside the other (Woolfork &

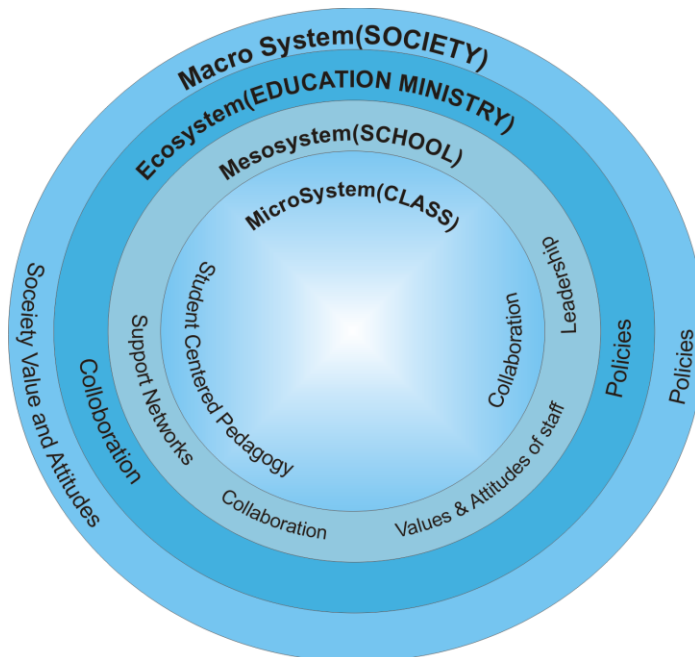


Margetts, 2013). Within each system, variables could exist and influences between those could be reciprocal. For instance, variables from the exosystem could influence microsystem or *vice versa* (Odom & Diamond, 1998).

Bronfenbrenner, names the four major such systems as the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem. The micro system is described as the immediate environment such as the family, classroom, peer group neighborhood etc. He referred to the mesosystem as ‘a system of microsystems’ through which different settings are linked such as school, family, work place and so on. The exosystem is discussed as the environment in which an individual is not directly involved but is greatly affected by the decisions made at the level. These include education system, government system, political system etc. The macro system is described as the broader cultural context, including cultural beliefs and values.

In their research that was aimed at reviewing the empirical literature on the practice of inclusion at early childhood level, Odom and Diamond (Odom & Diamond, 1998) used Bronfenbrenner’s ecological framework as their conceptual organizer for the review. They argued that “variables operating outside the immediate classroom setting influence the implementation of inclusion inside and outside of the microsystem” (pp. 4-5). According to Odom and Diamond, variables such as collaboration among professionals at mesosystem, social policies from exosystem and cultural or societal values and beliefs from the macro

system level may influence inclusive education at the microsystem, the classroom. The figure below shows the factors or variables that may influence inclusive education at the four levels (macrosystem, exosystem, mesosystem and microsystem). For the purpose of this study, the macrosystem, exosystem, mesosystem and microsystem are conceptualized as the society, education system, school and classroom respectively.



*Figure 1: The ecological framework showing the factors and levels that influence the development of inclusive education.*

Although inclusive education requires input from the broader society, in implementing inclusive education, the main focus should be on developing inclusive schools (Ainscow, 2005).

### **2.6.1 Developing inclusive schools**

Developing inclusive schools is about creating a system that includes all pupils and is structured in a way to cater for everyone's needs (Angelides, 2004). Creating an inclusive culture is the most important way to restructure an inclusive school (Booth & Ainscow, 2002) . According to Booth and Ainscow, a school culture is at the heart of school development as it has the potential to support or undermine the developments and affects policies and practices. In a similar vein, Maehr and Midgley (1996) stressed the importance of school culture. They believe that school cultures define the purpose and meaning of schooling for students and have an impact on the kind of learners they will become. Additionally, they claimed that a school culture makes a difference in the life and learning of students by stating, “school culture in fact shapes what happens in the lives of those who participate in that culture” (p. 85).

#### **2.6.1.1 Creating inclusive school cultures**

Peterson and Deal (as cited in Carrington & Elkins, 2002) defined school culture as the norms, values, beliefs, traditions, and rituals that gets created over time, as people work together, solve problems, and confront challenges. They also noted

that these shape how people think, feel, and act in schools and in turn binds the school together making it special. Some important factors for an inclusive culture are collaboration, values and attitudes held by staff, leadership and commitment, and support systems (Carrington & Elkins, 2002; Mitchell, 2010).

**a) *Collaboration***

One of the important factors for successful inclusion is collaboration between the SEN and general teachers. Atkins (2008) argues that collaboration between SEN and general teachers is crucial for inclusion because while general education teachers have limited skills and knowledge relating to special education students, the special education teachers have limited training in general education content and curriculum. Thus, if they collaborate they could share their expertise, knowledge and training to work together with SEN students in inclusive classrooms. Findings by Sautner (2008) supported the argument of Atkins. In his study Sautner aimed to find out what the teachers did and said to make their schools inclusive and safe for all students. He found that ‘collaboration’ was the main key. All staff members he interviewed consistently identified collaboration and teamwork as a key to their success in practice and as an important source of additional support. In addition, those teachers pointed out that having set times in their daily programs to work together was an important resource for collaboration.

In the study conducted by Eisenman, Pleet, Wandry, and McGinley, (2011) in an inclusive high school, these authors found that in that school the SEN teachers responsibilities was extended from only student support to teacher support for better inclusion. Among the responsibilities of the SEN teachers was to collaborate and problem-solve with other teachers, specialists and administrators, giving suggestions on how teachers might accommodate the entire class, how to present information in a way that is less teacher-centered and more student-centered. They also found that through establishment of strategies such as sharing accountability, developing shared practice, SEN teachers being physically accessible, SEN teachers and general education teachers' co-teaching and SEN teachers acting as coaches made the school more inclusive.

#### **b) *Values and attitudes***

A positive attitude towards difference, disability and inclusion is important because inclusive education relies on educators accepting the right of students with SEN to be included in general classrooms and participate in education on an equal basis (Mitchell, 2008). Sharing the same idea, Jones (2011) provided an example: When teachers feel that a student is too different to include in the general education and his needs are too dissimilar from his age peers, this does not portray a positive attitude but reflects that students can only be included if they are close to 'normal' and could be excluded when their behaviour and responses are far away from the view of normality. According to Jones, this approach to

difference represents the medical model of disability, and hence, argues that an inclusive environment requires teachers to construct difference socially. Booth and Ainscow (2002) also pointed to the importance of moving away from explaining education failure in relation to the characteristics of individual children to evaluating barriers to participation and learning experienced by students within the school system. Carrington (1999, p. 262) supports this by commenting that, “a critical aspect of the changes needed in schools relates to the way teachers and others in the education conceptualize difference and education failure”. Ballard (2004) shares a similar view and calls for a cultural transformation in ideas about disability and education in schools. He notes:

If disabled children are to be genuinely included in the mainstream of education, this cannot involve special education thought and practice. Categorising and naming children as ‘special’ identifies them as different from others, and different in ways that are not valued in present mainstream schools and society. What is needed for the inclusion of presently devalued disabled children is a cultural transformation in ideas about disability, about schools and about teaching. (p.318)

One factor that transforms attitudes according to Mitchell (2008) is the face-to-face day-to-day contact with students with SEN. Another factor that helps embrace attitudes, values and skills relevant for the educators is teacher training. According to Forlin (2010) without relevant knowledge and positive dispositions

towards inclusion, teachers are unlikely to give their full commitment and engage fully in the development of inclusive schools. Forlin also views teacher education as a critical factor in ensuring that inclusive education becomes a reality in schools. She asserts that “with the movement towards an inclusive schooling system, teacher education has become an important aspect of enabling this or conversely disenabling this” (p. 649).

Research has shown how teacher education influences teachers’ future practices (Jordan, Schwartz, & McGhie-Richmond, 2009; Morton & Gordon, 2006). Jordan et al. found that elementary classroom teachers who believed students with special needs were their responsibilities tend to be more effective overall with all of their students. Hence, they claim that effective inclusionary practices depend in part on the beliefs of teachers about the nature of disability, and about their roles and responsibilities in working with students with SEN. Similarly, in their study, Morton and Gordon (2006) found that when initial teacher education providers held a “partial” inclusion approach, the same was found in schools and among teachers as well. Therefore, it is vital to incorporate good inclusive practices in teacher education, in order to enable effective inclusion in the schools.

### ***c) Leadership and commitment***

“School principals, along their teachers have a responsibility to develop an inclusive culture in their schools” (Mitchell, 2008, p. 35). Among the

responsibilities are demonstrating leadership and commitment to the philosophy of inclusive education and its implementation. While the school principal plays a critical leadership role, other individuals in the school may play the same or different role in developing an inclusive culture in the school (Mitchell, 2008).

Forlin and Lian (2008) share the same view, where according to them, developing inclusive schools requires the total commitment of school leaders, and teachers from both special and regular education systems that are responsible for bringing the change. In their view, all the members in a school community play an important role. For instance, a school leader needs to be a holistic leader whose purpose is to create the structure and framework for collaborative meaning making and shared vision building. On the other hand, while the role of an inclusive mainstream teacher is to use new teaching strategies to cater for the increasingly diverse population, a special education teacher is expected to have the expert knowledge about the needs of students with disabilities and be prepared to use the knowledge and work collaboratively with mainstream teachers to support them with accommodating children with higher support needs.

#### **d) *Support***

For inclusion, building up support is an important factor. According to UNESCO (2003), these supports may include a range of resources, teaching materials, special equipment and additional personnel. In the same vein McConkey and



Bradley (2010) stressed that teachers need support at all levels because factors such as large classes, poorly equipped classrooms and inadequate buildings may hinder their effort to inclusion. They believe, however, there are two types of support that teachers especially benefit from. One of them is advice from specialists in making an accurate assessment of the child's learning difficulty and their contributions with appropriate means to support those students. The other is classroom assistants being available for teachers to call upon for assistance with meeting the needs of students with SEN. He further provided suggestions on how support could be built. Firstly, teachers can be advised by specialists who could visit mainstream schools and spend time in classrooms supporting them in teaching students who need extra support. Secondly, teachers can be provided with training. Thirdly, volunteers can be recruited from families and communities to support teachers. On the other hand, UNESCO (2003) argued that, first it is important to use and manage the existing resources effectively, through cooperation between teachers, support staff, care givers and the learners themselves.

Booth (as cited in Carrington, 1999) believes that the ultimate goal of an inclusive school culture is to increase meaningful participation for all pupils in the life and curricula of the school and reduce exclusionary factors within the school.

## **2.7 Exclusion in education**

Exclusion is defined by Booth and Ainscow (2002) as all those temporary or longer lasting pressures which get in the way of full participation. Mittler (2000) shares a similar view. According to him, the level of inclusion-exclusion depends on the day-to-day experiences of children in classrooms that define the quality of participation in the whole range of learning experiences provided by the school. Booth (as cited in Kearney, 2009) believes that the process of educational exclusion occurs when students' participation in the culture and curricular of mainstream schools is decreased. He further elaborated on this by stating that when a student is denied access to everything that happens in school such as access to the curriculum, access to friendship groups, access to teacher time and so forth, these are all forms of exclusion. Booth also argued that when students are denied access to the culture and curricular of mainstream school, they are being devalued.

The negative impact of devaluing and exclusion has been discussed by Forest and Pearpoint (1992) and Mittler (2000). Forest and Pearpoint (as cited in Kearney, 2009) believe that when people are devalued, they develop feelings of alienation and isolation which may lead to crime and other social issues. Likewise, Mittler (2000) pointed out that students who are educationally excluded are found to be more on the verge of feeling socially isolated and experiencing loss of confidence

as learners and individuals. He further noted that these students at times can be misunderstood as disruptive behaviour, for which the actions taken by the school and their peers could isolate them further.

Booth and Ainscow (2000) argue that often it is students who have impairments or those who are considered as having learning difficulties that get excluded from the mainstream schools. This exclusion takes place due to many factors that act as barriers and challenge the development of inclusive education in schools.

### **2.7.1 Barriers to inclusive education**

Most of the difficulties faced by inclusive education arise from the realities of the educational system rather than the characteristics of children with disabilities (McConkey & Bradley, 2010). According to Munir (2010), these include inappropriate curricula and materials, poorly trained work force, poor evaluation processes, inappropriate means of instruction and negative attitudes among staff. In a study by Pivik, McComas, and LaFlamme (2002), students with physical disabilities and their parents identified barriers that relate to four main categories; the physical environment (e.g., narrow doorways, ramps); intentional attitudinal barriers (eg., isolation, bullying) unintentional attitudinal barriers (e.g., lack of knowledge, understanding, or awareness); and physical limitations (e.g., difficulty with manual dexterity).

Booth and Ainscow (2002) argue that the concept and language of special educational needs also acts as a barrier to the development of inclusive education in schools. According to them, identifying students as having SEN leads to lower expectations. It was also found to be diverting the attention from difficulties faced by students without the label, sources of difficulties associated in the school culture, teaching approaches, organization, policy and curriculum. Powell and Tutt (2007) believe that a student's feeling of inclusion rather than exclusion depends on two main things: the curriculum on offer and the environment in which it is delivered. As the two main barriers to inclusion, I would discuss these below.

### **2.7.1 .1 Curriculum**

Curriculum plays a critical role in developing inclusive education. It can be a major obstacle as well as an important gate-way for inclusion depending on how it is designed. On the one hand, curriculum becomes an obstacle to inclusion when it is extensive, demanding or centrally designed and rigid, leaving little flexibility for teachers to adapt, and its content is distant to the children's real life. On the other hand, curriculum could facilitate inclusive education when flexibility is provided for teachers to make differentiations to better suit the individual learners (UNESCO, 2003).

Garner (2009) views differentiation of the curriculum as vital and argues that, it is a base line strategy for dealing with students with SEN. Foreman (2008) shares the same view. In his view, modifications to the curriculum are necessary in order to allow and increase participation by all learners. He believes that modification to the curriculum depends on the observed differences among learners. According to Koga and Hall (as cited in Foreman, 2008), modifications might be necessary to be made to the content, the level of difficulty, intended goals and the method of instruction.

The importance of modification to the curriculum was pointed out in an Irish case study. This study by Ring and Travers (2005) explored the barriers to inclusion of a pupil with severe learning difficulties. The results revealed that trying to meet the needs of the child with the same curriculum acted as a barrier for his learning and participation. This was mainly because he had difficulty in achieving the goals in the curriculum and was only able to follow some of the content in it.

UNESCO (2003) argues that an inclusive curriculum should be diverse with practical skills, allow teachers flexibility to adjust it to meet the needs of individual students and give teachers the flexibility in assessment, examination and evaluation as well. This is supported by Mitchell (2008) by stating that curriculum should allow teachers the flexibility to bring adaptation to the method of assessments to take account of the learner's disabilities such as a blind learner

who might need to be tested orally or in Braille, or a learner with a learning disability who might need more time in an exam. With regard to assessments, Mittler (2000) and Mitchell (2008) point out the importance of teacher assessments aimed at finding out the student's next step for his or her learning and mastery (formative assessments) instead of assessments that measure their progress in relation to the National curriculum with national tests (summative assessments).

### **2.7.1.2 Environment**

An inclusive environment is an environment that is accessible for all learners including those with mobility difficulties (UNESCO, 2003). Therefore, without modifications to the physical environment to suit learners with different disabilities, inclusive education is hard to achieve. According to Thomas, Walker and Webb (1998) the physical environment of a school reflects the attitude taken to inclusive education. Elaborating on the point further, they provided an example. "If, for example, inclusion is provided by a physically separate unit within a mainstream school, this betrays a particular outlook and philosophy to the incorporation of children with disabilities or other difficulties" (p. 59). They also argued that the way the broad physical provision within which the process takes place in the school can make the difference between segregation, integration and full inclusion.

A second important factor in an inclusive environment is safety (Karten, 2011) . Karten believes that students and staff should be assured of both physical and emotional safety. In terms of physical safety, for example, he stressed that teachers and students should be confident that they would not be hit, hurt or physically abused in anyway. This is supported by UNESCO (2003). UNESCO pointed out that schools may exclude students when there are issues of violence bullying and abuse going on in the school. With regards to emotional safety, Karten argued that students need to be able to be themselves, ask for help and feel warmly supported. For instance, students with muscular dystrophy require both physical and emotional support (Thorburn, 1997). According to Thorburn, the seat for a student with muscular dystrophy should hold the pelvis level and maintain a natural inward curve in the lower spine. She also argued that because these students' special needs arise in the area of emotional pressure, they need to be supported in maintaining relationships with peers, attendance at school and maintaining motivation.

An equally vital factor is the sense of belonging and being valued. While Foreman (2008) pointed out the importance of equally valuing students with disabilities, Powell and Tutt (2007) emphasized that as a social concept, inclusion requires people to feel a sense of belonging. The importance of students' feeling of belonging is discussed by Sapon-Shevin (2011). Based on previous studies, she

noted that there exists a correlation between students' sense of belonging and their academic and social achievement.

## **2.8 Studies on developing inclusive education**

There are several studies on developing inclusive education. Some researched inclusive education holistically in the school (Avramidis, Bayliss, & Burden, 2002; Singal, 2008; Strogilos, 2011; Yee, 2005) while others focused on the classroom only (Nilholm & Alm, 2010)

Avramidis, Bayliss and Burden (2002) conducted a qualitative case study in the South West of England that was identified by the local education authority as inclusive. They reported that the environment of the school was modified to accommodate students with physical disabilities, support systems and additional resources were established from the local authority to ensure the needs of students with special needs are met. In addition, the school atmosphere was observed as inclusive when the school community had a positive attitude towards inclusion, where students with SEN were not excluded from any class or extra-curricular activities and when their additional support was provided within the mainstream class rather than being withdrawn from lessons. Nonetheless, the social isolation and bullying that went on in the school and teachers' belief that not all students with SEN can be included was reported. Based on this belief of the teachers, the



researchers concluded that they were more into an integration model than an inclusive model.

A qualitative case study by Yee (2005) investigated the change process experiences of one primary school in Hong Kong that was developing inclusive education. The findings indicated that the change process was emotion-laden, most of the stakeholders learned through practice and the critical person in the change process was the resource teacher in the school. Some inclusive practices observed in the school culture included the support models adopted such as the usage of the resource teacher with a training background in special education needs and using parents as resources to help in the class. Additionally, the caring attitude of teachers and their close personal relationship with the students with disabilities were observed as the key for those students to feel they are valued and important.

Among other observations by Yee were that the school also used a deficit model rather than a social model. In addition, the school adopted a policy according to which all students were treated the same way rather than according to their individual needs. Thus the same curriculum was followed without modification. It was also found that parents of students with disabilities were expected to make up for the inadequate learning at school with extra remedial at home. In addition, little structural changes were brought to the school. Furthermore, learning was

only judged with the attainment of marks which required parents to get students with disabilities to work more to get good marks which resulted in stress for children.

Drawing on qualitative data collected through interviews with the key professionals and classroom observations, Singal (2008) reported the practices and experiences of professionals involved in the process of developing inclusive education in some schools in India. Findings from this study revealed that inclusive education in most of the schools was initiated by the school heads and this began with integration of students with SEN from the SEN units. However, these students were found to be excluded from meaningful participation in the curricula and culture of the school. The main reasons for this was teachers taking partial responsibility of the integrated students, limited modifications brought to the teaching practices and lack of collaboration between the SEN teachers and general teachers. Teachers' lack of knowledge and skills to address the needs of students with SEN and their belief that not all students with SEN can be included were also reported.

Nilholm and Alm (2010) reported findings from a case study done in a classroom in Sweden. Their findings revealed that the class was inclusive. One of the features of the class was teachers making the learning community a place where differences are valued. In this regard, most of the students and all the teachers

believed difference was as an asset rather than a problem. In addition, students' difficulties were recognized by teachers but valued for what they were. The students from the class were reported as generally happy and that no one was being socially isolated.

Some of the common practices adopted by the teachers included adapting the learning environment, methods and materials to individual needs, utilizing group activities to strengthen social process and learning, creating good relationship with parents, incorporating talking and discussions in academic exercises, encouraging joint problem solving, being positive, and avoiding confrontational relations. It was also noted that often students with disabilities were provided extra support in class and more practical work was provided for those who had difficulty with theory. Collaboration between the general teacher and paraprofessional and extra support provided to those who needed was also apparent in the study.

Strogilos (2011) used an evaluative case study research to describe and evaluate a Greek primary school's attempt to implement inclusive education while focusing on the problems and prospects of inclusion in a highly centralized education system. His findings indicated that highly centralized systems limit teachers' thinking when they have to follow an undifferentiated curriculum as a basic requirement of the Ministry of Education. Strogilos also added that an undifferentiated curriculum provides teachers with an excuse not to differentiate.

He believes that it could be argued that centralized systems based on unmodified curricula and organization “provides better opportunities for the integration of pupils with disabilities than for their inclusion” (p.14).

In addition, Strogilos (2011) reported that in the school, inclusion was planned as something extra for students with SEN. He also noted that the attitude of some general teachers was that SEN students can be taught better by SEN teachers. Furthermore, teachers experiencing a lack of time to differentiate the curriculum while working on the text books most of the time was also reported. On the other hand, Strogilos noted that many practices that enhanced inclusive education were practiced within the inclusion program. These include collaborative teaching and group planning; multidisciplinary collaboration between the psychologists, SLTs and teachers; and increase in the number of student support within the general class.

## **2.9 Developing inclusive education in less developed countries**

There has been an increase in the number of children with significant disabilities throughout the world, and 80% of these children live in less developed regions (McConkey & Bradley, 2010). This poses many challenges to low-income countries, one of which is promoting inclusive education. Given that establishing

inclusive education within any country takes lot of time and effort, the process is more challenging and daunting to low-income countries (McConkey & Bradley, 2010; Mitchell, 2010). The reasons for this have been discussed in previous studies (Eleweke & Rodda, 2002; Mitchell, 2008). In the study by Eleweke & Rodda concerning enhancing inclusive education in developing countries, Eleweke and Rodda provided evidence that inclusive education is not successfully implemented in most developing countries due to many obstacles. For instance, in the study that investigated the problems of inclusion in the West African country of Nigeria by Anumonye (as cited in Eleweke & Rodda, 2002), many schools with integrated special education needs students either lacked or had inadequate facilities essential for educating students with disabilities. The data also indicated that most regular schools with special education needs students did not have personnel to provide important advisory services that would assist the regular teachers with teaching and managing the learners with special needs in their school. It was also found that there was a lack of interaction between the children with disabilities and their teachers and other pupils. As a result, children with disabilities were found to be socially isolated and seldom participated in classroom activities.

Based on studies by Anumonye , Muthukrishna , Mawutor and Hayford , Chadha Matala, and Kiyimba, Eleweke and Rodda (2002) concluded that factors such as inadequate facilities, absence of support services, large class sizes, poor

infrastructure, inadequate personal training programs, lack of funding structure and the absence of enabling legislation are some of the major obstacles to achieving meaningful inclusion in developing countries.

According to Mitchell (2008) important factors or elements for successful implementation of inclusive education are lacking in many of the less developed countries. In Asia and South Africa, Mitchell (2008) observed factors such as negative attitudes to disability, examination oriented education systems, a lack of support services, rigid teaching methods, assessment dominated by the medical model, a lack of parent involvement and lack of clear national policies as major obstacles to implementation of inclusive education.

The studies by UNICEF (2003a, 2003b, 2003c) also provide evidence of inclusive education in some developing countries. The aim of these studies was to examine the type of education accessible for students with disabilities in five developing countries from South Asia, namely India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Bangladesh. In general, the findings indicated that a large number of students with disabilities in these countries did not have access to any type of education. It was also found that the minority of students with disabilities who had access to education studied in separate provisions because of the dominant belief in the society. The study further noted key observations from each country. In this literature review, however, I will be discussing Sri Lanka, India and Bangladesh

because these countries are the closest neighboring countries of Maldives, where my research was conducted. In addition, professionals from these countries work in the Maldives.

In Sri Lanka, according to UNICEF (2003c), special education was found to have moved from segregation to integration. It was also observed that more recently, the conceptual understanding of inclusive education seemed to be growing. However, one common feature of inclusive practice was the development of special education units within regular schools. Special education teachers were found to be taking the full responsibility of students from the units and their interaction with non-disabled students was found to be limited to social activities. It was also observed that the role of the special units was to mediate and facilitate students with SEN admission to regular classrooms.

Another key observation was that although the majority of professionals and practitioners agree on the philosophy of inclusive education, some were doubtful about it because of the inadequacy of existing resources in schools. Some of the barriers that have been noted include unavailability of support services such as speech therapy and physiotherapy, regular teachers having limited skills to work with students with SEN and some students and teachers looking at students with SEN with pity.

In India, inclusive education was found to have gained momentum in the last decade. However, as many schools had large numbers of students in the classes, teachers were found to be reluctant to include students with disabilities, mainly because they considered it as an extra workload. Other observations included inadequate number of trained personnel to work with different disabilities, lack of curriculum flexibility and limited attention paid to learners' needs in the teaching and learning process (UNICEF, 2003b).

In Bangladesh, not enough attention seemed to be paid to inclusive education. It was found that inclusive education was practiced only by some non-government agencies. Nonetheless, it was observed that there was a growing interest from policy makers and educators in providing education for all children in inclusive settings. Despite this growing interest, there was a lack of trained and skilled personnel to support inclusive education. It was also observed that in Bangladesh, school enrolment of students with disabilities was extremely low and those with disabilities who attended school were found to be marginalized in mainstream school because of the negative attitude towards disability among the school community. In addition, lack of flexibility in the curriculum to cater for the needs of students with disabilities was observed (UNICEF, 2003a).

Consistent findings in Bangladesh were observed in a more recent study by Munir (2010). According to him, the main barriers to inclusion in Bangladesh are related



to the curriculum, textbooks, teaching learning processes, work place, support and attitudes of school staff and community. With regards to the curriculum, he argued that the curriculum is extensive, demanding, centrally designed and rigid. Additionally, he noted that the curriculum lacks flexibility to cater for different learning needs and speeds of children. He further noted that teacher training in Bangladesh is limited and inadequate, that teaching in schools is dominated by the traditional ways that focus on memorizing facts. He also pointed out that due to the negative attitude towards disability, often students with disabilities tend to get abused by family members, peers and other community members.

## **2.10 Education of students with SEN in the Maldives**

Education of students with SEN is a new area in the Maldives. Until 1985, students with disabilities did not have access to education within the education system (Human Rights Commission of the Maldives, 2010). Education for students with disabilities began with the introduction of a special class for students with hearing impairment, in one of the primary schools in the capital. About two decades later, in 2006, the government started establishing SEN units within regular schools, with a vision to set up at least one school in each atoll that enrolls students with SEN.

Apparently, similar to the developing countries discussed above, Maldives is moving towards inclusion. It is, however, a new phenomenon in the Maldives and recently, some steps have been taken to enhance inclusive education in the country (Ministry of Education, 2008). According to Ministry of Education (2008) “Maldives is committed to inclusive education and the last gate post of inclusion, special needs children have been brought to the forefront through the formulation of a national policy on disability” (p. 55). The Ministry of Education (2008) also noted a tremendous increase in the number of students enrolled in the SEN units over the years and regarded this as evidence of increased awareness and support for inclusion in the country. Additionally, it was noted that as inclusive education is at the developing stage, there is as yet no evidence to show the gaps in its implementation.

However, a recent study by the Human Rights Commission of the Maldives (2010) provided some important information. This study was aimed at evaluating activities addressing the rights of persons with disabilities and discussed many issues related to support services provided for people with disabilities in the Maldives, including the gaps and challenges in its delivery. Data was gathered through interviews with key officials of government ministries, individual employees of the government who were engaged in providing the services and the recipients of those services. The study initially described the support services within the country for people with disabilities. These support services include

development of SEN units, screening of school-aged children for disabilities, free medication for psychiatric patients, residential care for psychiatric patients and geriatric patients, financial assistance for people with disabilities, assistive devices such as wheelchairs, crutches, hearing aids, spectacles and the release of the Maldivian sign language dictionary.

On the other hand, the study (Human Rights Commission of the Maldives, 2010) revealed that real gaps exist between the supports services, resulting people with disabilities having to face barriers accessing their basic needs. For instance, although assistive devices are available from the government, limited information about the service was communicated to people with disabilities. According to the study, this was a deliberate action which was justified with, “the more people know—the more people will seek the available services” (p. 67). Similarly, no educational opportunities were made available for students with disabilities to lower and higher secondary education. It was also noted that there was no evidence of early detection and intervention which leads to children with disabilities having to experience environmental and social barriers to learning and participation.

Another important discussion was about barriers to educational opportunities for students with SEN. This was discussed in relation to access to basic education and barriers faced within schools. It was noted that while nine out of ten students with

disabilities do not attend school, most of those who attend study in special classes have no access to general education. Additionally, it was also noted that even schools with SEN units have limited physical access to the library, laboratory, school office and toilets. Other than limitations with access, it was reported that students with SEN in schools are faced with attitudinal barriers too. Teachers' unwillingness to accept students with physical and mental impairments was also noted. The main reason for this was discussed as lack of attention given to teacher training. "Training of special education teachers was not given high priority by the government" (Human Rights Commission of the Maldives, 2010, p. 64) As a consequence, it was noted that there are limited SEN teachers in the country.

Finally, there is limited knowledge about disability among government staff. For example, SEN teachers working in the SEN units have not had adequate training to teach students with SEN. There is limited access on transport and access to premises (homes, schools, hospitals, mosques, government offices, courts and shops). It is noteworthy that the buildings, roads, pavements, road signs, traffic lights, are not designed to be friendly for persons with disabilities. Further, the lack of visible leadership and commitment towards protecting the rights of persons with disabilities and supporting them was noted. "There is no single, highly visible and accessible entry point to all government disability services and support." (p. 71). This was further elaborated by discussing that while the Ministry of Health and Family had the responsibility to provide leadership on

disability issues, there was no office, department, division or unit under the ministry that was mandated to develop policies, coordinate activities and monitor the government's disability related programmes.

## **2.11 Focus of the study**

From the above discussion it is clear that inclusive education is a very recent initiative in the Maldives. Therefore, my literature search resulted in no studies done on inclusive education in the Maldives. Hence, the focus of this study is to look at, explore, document and understand the development of inclusive education in one urban school in the Maldives.

## **2.12 Summary**

This review has analyzed literature around developing inclusive education. The review revealed that development of inclusive education is an unending complex process that requires input from four levels: the society, education ministry, school and classroom. It also reported that the term inclusive education has different interpretations which in turn influence practice and provision. Firstly, inclusion has been interpreted as merely a disability issue where the focus leads on to mainstreaming or integration of students with disabilities. Secondly, it has been linked with exclusion where the focus moves to responding to barriers to participation and learning faced by all students. Thirdly, it has been interpreted as

an issue of social justice and attention is paid to providing equal educational opportunities to all students irrespective of their differences through the development of inclusive schools.

According to the literature, developing inclusive schools requires an educational change. Developing an inclusive school is moving away from special education and creating an inclusive school culture where everyone has access to, feels safe and a sense of belonging, is equally respected, valued and supported. An inclusive school culture should respond positively to student diversity, through modifications to the school environment, curriculum, assessment, method of instruction and support systems. This requires curriculums that allow flexibility and teachers who are trained with the knowledge, attitudes and values to teach all students including students with special educational needs.

The literature also noted that developing inclusive education is more challenging to less developed countries because of factors such as negative attitudes to disability, examination oriented education systems, large class sizes, poor infrastructure, lack of support services, rigid teaching methods, assessment dominated by a medical model, a lack of parent involvement, inadequate personal training programs and lack of clear national policies and the absence of enabling legislation.

## **Chapter Three: Methodology**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This study was conducted to look at, explore, document and understand the development of inclusive education in one urban school in the Maldives. The main focus of the study was on the practices, experiences and perspectives of different stakeholders involved in the process. The research questions that guided the data collection were as follows:

- How do the school leaders and teachers make sense of inclusive education?
- What were the steps taken to move the school towards inclusion?
- How does inclusive education look in one class in the school?
- What factors influenced the development of inclusive education in the school?

This chapter provides the details of the methodology and methods used in this study. First, it describes and justifies the research design in which the study is situated. Next, a description of the data collection and data analysis procedures is provided. Then, the important ethical aspects pertaining to this study are discussed, followed by a summary at the end of the chapter.

## **3.2 Research design**

This study employs the qualitative approach to research. Qualitative research has been defined by (Rubin & Babbie, 2009) as "...methods that allow research procedures to evolve as more observations are gathered and that typically permit the use of subjectivity to generate deeper understandings of the meaning of human experience." Qualitative research is useful for describing complex phenomena (Burke & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). It allows data to be gathered in the natural setting where the phenomena occur, by the researcher as the key instrument instead of the use of surveys or experiments which are more common in quantitative research. In addition, it can reveal how participants make sense of their lives in relation to the area the researcher is studying and can be used to find participants' perspectives (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). This research study, which explores the development of inclusive education, is a complex process with multiple dimensions. Therefore, a qualitative single case study methodology was chosen to undertake the study.

A qualitative case study is an approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (e.g., observations, interviews, audio-visual material, and documents and reports), and reports a case description and case-based themes. (Creswell, as cited in Merriam, 2009, p. 43)



According to Merriam (2009) qualitative case studies are particularistic (the study focus is on a particular situation, event, program or phenomenon), descriptive (the end product of a case study is a rich, “thick” description of the phenomenon under study) and heuristic (illuminate the reader’s understanding of the phenomenon under study).

A researcher chooses to do a qualitative cases study because of his or her interest, in insight and interpretation of the case, rather than hypothesis testing (Merriam, 2009) or generalizing the findings to a larger group (Stake as cited in Lichtman, 2011). A qualitative case study design is the most relevant when the researcher wants to understand a particular problem or situation in great depth, and where a case rich information is available (Patton, 1987) or, when the case represents an extreme or unique case.

The researcher’s rationale for choosing the case study methodology for this research is because the school chosen for the study is rich in student diversity, having one of the largest special education units for students with intellectual disabilities, and is also unique as it is one of the early adopters of inclusive education in the Maldives. This study can be characterized as an intrinsic case study as the researcher is interested in the specific school, not because of its

representativeness of other schools, but for its uniqueness and information richness (Wellington, 2000).

### **3.3 Setting and Participants**

The setting of this study was an urban school in the Maldives (Grades 1-10) which is situated in the capital city, Male'. This school is the only school in the capital that serves students with different intellectual disabilities. It was one of the early adopters of inclusive education. At the time of the study in 2011, the school was making more attempts towards inclusion. The participants of the study include school leaders, general teachers, SEN teachers, parents and students.

Qualitative case studies employ two levels of sampling. First, selecting the case to be studied, and next, selecting the sample within the case, unless all the people, activities or documents within the case are to be studied (Merriam, 2009). For this study, at both levels, purposeful sampling was used. The school was chosen because it served students with disabilities and was taking steps towards inclusion. In addition, the government requires schools with special units to provide teacher training, provide input for special education teachers and develop the sensitivity of the whole education system in order to protect and respect the rights of students with SEN (Ministry of Education, 2008). Thus, it was believed that this school

and its community would have developed better inclusive education practices and richer experiences with educating students with SEN in inclusive settings.

However, taking into consideration time limitations, one class was studied on an in-depth level. This class was chosen as it was the only general class that had a student with physical disabilities, as well as a student who was fully mainstreamed from the SEN unit. The power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases for in-depth studies. Therefore, choosing participants with the above criteria and studying them helped the researcher to learn more about issues important to the purpose of the research rather than gathering little information from a large statistically significant sample (Patton, 1987).

### **3.3.1 Procedure**

To get access to the field, a formal path was followed. First, a letter with information of the study was sent to the Ministry of Education requesting permission to conduct the study. The approval letter from the ministry along with the information letter of this study was sent to the head of the school asking for his permission for the researchers' access to the school. Once permission was granted, the leading teacher in charge of students with SEN in the school and some SEN teachers were approached and discussion around inclusive education in the school was carried out. From this initial discussion, it was clear that the school had taken some steps towards inclusion and was planning more. Therefore, this study sought

to investigate the process taken by the school in their efforts to become inclusive. In addition the study researched the practices undertaken in one particular classroom.

Different stakeholders from the school community who were involved in the inclusion process were recruited as the participants for the study in order to understand their perceptions of what was going on. The study explored the perceptions, practices and experiences of three school leaders, four SEN teachers, seven general teachers, four students with SEN and four parents of students with SEN. Table 3 gives a brief overview of the participants. The participants are not described in detail to protect their identity.

*Table 3: Participants' details*

School leaders	The school leaders who were most closely involved with SEN and inclusion in the school
SEN teachers	Teachers who taught those students who were integrated for some subjects in the process of moving towards inclusion
General teachers	Teachers who were teaching students with SEN in a general class
Students	Students with SEN who were integrated or fully mainstreamed  Two of the students were identified with Autism,

	one with muscular dystrophy and the other with behaviour difficulties ( not formally diagnosed)
Parents	Parents or guardians of the students who were chosen for the study

Once the participants were considered, the school leaders and teachers were approached by the researcher in person inviting them to participate in the study. However, students and parents were invited through the class teacher and the leading teacher for students with SEN. Before the data collection process, each participant was provided with details about the research. Participants were also allowed to clarify anything they wanted about the research and their role in the research. In addition, consent forms were provided asking every participant for participatory approval for their individual cooperation. The information and consent forms are included in Appendix A.

### **3.4. Data collection**

A case study uses a variety of evidence to explore, describe and understand the case such as documents, focus group interviews, semi-structured interviews, observations, archival records, and physical artifacts as data collection tools (Rubin & Babbie, 2009; Yin, 1989). Yin believes that a case study should not be limited to a single source of evidence because a major strength of case study data collection is the opportunity to use many different sources of evidence. Similarly,

Gillham (2000) views the central concern of a case study as the collection and study of multiple forms of evidence in sufficient detail to achieve understanding. The most important advantage of doing this is “triangulation” as any finding or conclusion that is based on several sources of information is much more accurate and convincing. This study used documents, open-ended interviews, and observations as the data collection methods.

### **3.4.1 Data collection procedure**

Data collection and analysis were done simultaneously in this study though more formal analysis took place once most of the data was collected (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). For this study, data analysis, though informally, began with the first few visits to the field and initial interview with the leading teacher for students with SEN in the school. Data collection and analysis became an ongoing process, using some of the suggestions by Bogdan and Biklen (2007).

1. *Force yourself to make decisions that narrow the study.* After the first few visits and initial interview with the leading teacher for students with SEN, focus was narrowed to the steps taken to move the school towards inclusion. The researcher found this more interesting and feasible, especially because of the short period (the Month of Ramadan when the school was having shorter sessions).

2. *Force yourself to make decisions concerning the type of study you want accomplish.* While collecting data and analyzing them, the main focus was on understanding the process in detail so as to describe it in detail in the final report.
3. *Develop analytic questions.* Although two main questions were taken to the field, as the data collection continued, more questions were added and their answers were sought. In addition, one question was even rephrased.

The questions that were initially taken to the field were: how does one school community make sense of inclusive education; and what things really work for successful inclusive education?

However, following the initial discussions with some key participants and a few field visits, the following questions were added:

- a) What were the steps taken to move the school towards inclusion?
- b) How does inclusive education look in one class in the school?
- c) What factors influenced the development of inclusive education in the school?

The question, what things really work for successful inclusive education was rephrased and stated as the question (c) above.

4. *Plan data collection sessions in light of what you find in previous observations.* Although in the research proposal, it was planned that only two school leaders were to be interviewed (the school head and the leading teacher for SEN students), during the school head's and the leading teacher's interview, it was clear that an assistant principal had been selected to act as the overall in-charge of students with SEN. Therefore, she was added to the participants' list and interviewed. In addition, the class chosen for the in-depth study was selected based on previous interviews and observations. From the leading teacher's and SEN teacher's interviews, it was found out that a student had been fully mainstreamed from the SEN unit and that the student studied in one of the grade five classes. This was noted as an observer comment and followed up.

Additionally, an informal observation of the school structure revealed that with the SEN classes, there was one general class in the ground floor. A teacher participant stated the reason was that the class included a student who used a wheelchair. Further analysis showed that the student who was fully mainstreamed from the SEN unit studied in the same class. With permission from the class teacher, the researcher's first visit confirmed that in addition to having the only student who was fully mainstreamed from the SEN unit and the only student who came to the school in a wheelchair, the class also had a



student the teachers kept separate because of his behaviour. Considering the uniqueness of the class and the diversity of SEN in the class, the decision to choose the class for an in-depth study was made.

### **3.4.2 Data collection tools**

#### **Documents**

Documentary information is likely to be relevant to every case study topic (Yin, 1989) because documents can contain data that are rich in description. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) similarly note that, depending on how and to what extent they are used, documents can be a good source of data. The most important use of documents in a case study is to confirm and add to the evidence from other sources. In addition, information from documents can be used to make inferences and look for areas to inquire further. For this reason, government documents relating to this study, school schemes of work, teacher's lesson plans and the school inclusion policy were used as secondary sources of data for this study. These provided additional information to enhance understanding of the context, as well as helped to supplement and verify some of the findings from the interviews and observations.

#### **Interview**

The purpose of choosing interview as a data collection method for this study was because interviews help to gather descriptive data in the subjects' own words

(Bogdan & Biklen, 2007) which would allow the researcher to develop insights on how the participants interpret, practice and experience inclusive education. Considering the disadvantage of structured and unstructured interviews as discussed by Morse and Field (as cited in Boeiji, 2010), semi-structured interview method was selected for this study. According to Morse and Field, structured questions will limit the amount of data while unstructured interviews may stray off focus and just ask what the researcher thinks is appropriate and lead to either missing data on areas of interest and or bring in a high level of unnecessary information.

For this study, semi-structured interviews with the help of an interview guide with some broad topics/questions were carried out with all the participants. (see Appendix B).The semi-structured interviews allowed the researchers to be flexible, informal and conversational (Boeije, 2010). Except for the leading teacher in charge of SEN students and the teachers from the in-depth class, all the participants were interviewed individually once for 20-45 minutes. However, the SEN teachers were interviewed as a group in order to understand the wide range of views. All the interviews took place in the school at the most convenient time for the participants. Before starting the interviews, participants were reminded about the research purpose and the confidentiality of their comments made during the interview. Additionally, their permission to record the interviews was sought.

Reflective notes were also written after each interview, to complement the transcripts during the analysis stage.

### **Observation**

“Observation highlights detailed and specific information about educational activities and practices that would be difficult to ascertain in other circumstances” (Scott & Morrison, 2006, p. 168). For case studies, direct observation of the field is vital because it serves as a source of evidence. Observational evidence provides additional information about the topic under investigation and adds new dimensions for understanding the context and the phenomena (Yin, 1989).

With the permission from the school and individual participants, both formal and informal observations were carried out. An informal observation of the physical environment of the school was carried out during researcher’s visits to the field. The physical environment of a social setting can be important to yield what happens in that environment and these might indicate something about the climate or insufficiency of the organization (Patton, 1987). Formal observations were done in the classroom with a focus on student-teacher interactions, support to students and teaching and learning approaches. A total of six hours over three weeks were spent on observing students at work and play. Field notes were written as soon as possible after each observation with detailed descriptions of the place, people, events, activities and conversations describing what happened. With

observer comments, more areas for exploration and topics for interviewing were also noted.

### **3.5. Data analysis**

Although informal analysis took place while the data collection was ongoing, the more formal analysis and interpretation of data began after returning from the field and having most of the data collected. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) believe this is how beginning researchers can work because “beginning researchers often do not have the theoretical and substantive background to plug into issues and themes when they first arrive on the scene...something someone new to the field is not as likely to have as an old-timer” (p. 160). Grounded theory was used to carry out the analysis of the data. Some key elements of grounded theory are: the use of inductive approach to generate theory from data, use of the constant comparative coding scheme, and relying on theoretical sampling and saturation (Lichtman, 2011).

To begin the data analysis, some interviews were transcribed while translating to English. All these interviews were transcribed by the researcher herself to increase familiarity with the data. This is especially important for new researchers as the process would help “generate insights and hunches about what is going in the data” (Merriam, 2009, p. 174). At the same time, some field notes from the

observations were typed. Then all the transcripts, field notes and documents were individually read and re-read to find words or phrases that were the most eye catching, which Saldana (2009) believes is the initial step for coding. At this stage, the words, phrases, patterns of behaviour, subjects and events that stood out were written on the right side of the margin on hard copies of transcripts. Some of these initial codes for this study include ‘large number of students’, ‘lack of awareness’, ‘collaboration’, ‘support’, ‘plans’ etc. These were then listed on paper and categorized under major headings based on common properties and elements such as large number of students and lack of awareness being categorized under barriers to inclusion (Coffey & Atkinson, 2007). Bogdan and Biklen (2007) refer to this process as coding categories. Next, the categorized codes were broken into sub categories such as barriers being divided into creating barriers and removing barriers. Following that, data from the interviews, field notes and documents that fit the coding categories were searched. Then, the codes, categories and sub categories were gone through looking for patterns, themes and concepts. One of the themes that emerged was “exclusion within inclusion”.

As the data analysis process continued, more interviews were transcribed and more field notes were typed and the same process as stated above repeated. In addition, a short story (‘Just because I come to school in a wheelchair’) based on one of the participants data and an analytic memo on one of the themes, (exclusion within inclusion) was written (the story is included as Appendix C).

This helped the researcher to get more sense of the data and increased the engagement in the analysis process. In addition, plans were structured according to emerging themes (some plans are in Appendix D).

During this phase, some broader general explanations that began to emerge were discussed with two of the key participants to help advance the analysis. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) refer to this as ‘trying out ideas and themes on informants’ (p. 165). For instance, from the analysis, the researcher felt that there were two phases to the steps taken towards inclusion at the school. Therefore, an email was sent to the school leader, Sama, to ask what she thought about the explanation. The following is an excerpt from the email communication between the researcher and Sama.

Researcher: Is the process to inclusion something like: inclusion was at a trial stage from 2006-2011. During this time some students were integrated and one fully included. Also some steps were taken to move the school towards inclusion such as training of SEN staff, awareness sessions to students and teachers, writing the inclusion policy (Email sent on 19/05/2012)

Sama: You are perfectly correct (Email sent on 21/05/2012).

A Skype session with Sama was then conducted to clarify certain ambiguous information and fill in gaps in the collected data. After the selection of some

themes, findings were initially presented thematically with evidence from the data supporting them. However, at a later stage of analysis, the findings were revised, rearranged and presented in a narrative writing style to describe the inclusive education experience of the school in the form of a story. This was done as the researcher thought that when they were arranged as isolated themes, they did not tell the whole story and there was more to be understood about the case (Merriam, 2009). According to Merriam, this continued analysis beyond formation of categories link the findings of a study together in a meaningful way. She also considers this useful in a case study because “conveying an understanding of the case is the paramount consideration in analyzing the data” (p. 203). With some further analysis, findings were rearranged presenting the story of the case study, beginning from the school and then moving to the class. This arrangement better represented the interaction and relatedness of the findings and portrayed a clear picture of inclusive education in Hilaalee School.

### **3.6 Validity and reliability**

“All research is concerned with producing valid and reliable knowledge in an ethical manner” (Merriam, 2009, p. 209). To ensure validity and reliability of this study, some common strategies that are used in qualitative research such as triangulation, member checks, peer review, rich, thick descriptions and researcher

diary were used in this study. The subsequent sections explain how these strategies were addressed in this study.

### **3.6.1 Triangulation**

According to Hill and Denzin (as cited in Davidson & Tolich, 1999) triangulation is measuring the phenomena under study with multiple sources of information, methods, theories and techniques. This study is data triangulated by interviewing people in different status positions (school leaders, teachers, parents and students). Yin (1989) argues this as important in a case study because having attended only to the evidence supporting a single point of view could raise suspicion among the readers as a one-sided case. This study is also methodologically triangulated by using interviews, observations, and documents. This is an important way to consider the weaknesses of any single method or data source (Patton, 1987).

### **3.6.2 Member checks**

Member checks means “taking data and tentative interpretations back to the people from whom they were derived and asking if they are plausible” (Merriam, 2009, p. 229). As previously discussed in section 3.5, during the data analysis the researcher communicated with two key participants of the study during the analysis to make sure that the interpretations sounded true. Additionally, adult participants were sent their transcripts through individual emails for member



checking. Maxwell also emphasizes the importance of member checking by stating,

This is the single most important way of ruling out the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of what participants say and do and the perspectives they have on what is going on, as well as being an important way of identifying your own biases and misunderstandings of what you observed. (as cited in Merriam, 2009, p. 217)

### **3.6.3 Peer review**

Peer review has been described by Merriam (2009) as discussions with colleagues about the process of the study, the emerging findings and interpretations. Prior to conducting the study, the data collection and analysis procedures were planned and presented to the researcher's supervisors and the University of Canterbury Educational Research Human Ethics Committee. During the analysis, regular meetings were held with supervisors, a critical friend and a colleague who read, critiqued and commented on the findings and interpretations.

### **3.6.4 Rich, thick description**

This final report of the study is a rich thick description of the setting and findings, supported with evidence cited throughout the report, consisting either of quotes from the participant interviews, excerpts from the observational field notes or review of documents. According to Merriam (2009) a qualitative study with rich

and thick descriptions can help readers contextualize the study to determine the extent to which it matches their situation.

### **3.6.5 Researcher diary**

The researcher diary recorded thoughts, follow up interviews, observations, queries and any reminders for the researcher during the data collection and analysis stage. Although interviews were audio recorded, notes on interviews were also made in the diary which was then used during data transcribing process.

## **3.7 Reflexivity**

Reflexivity is “the recognition of underlying assumptions or bias that cause the researcher to formulate a set of questions in a particular way and to present findings in a particular way” (Mills as cited in Guerin, 2008). This is important in qualitative research in order to enhance the credibility of the study (Maxwell, 2005). Maxwell believes that, although it is not possible to fully eliminate researcher bias, acknowledging and being reflective about it is important.

Having been involved in the education sector in the Maldives for twelve years as an elementary teacher and teacher educator, I am familiar with the education system in the Maldives. In addition, as a parent of two school children, I have seen how different factors in a school contribute to the type of school experience students’ encounter. In particular, the negative school experience of my daughter

who had difficulties with speech made her more conscious of these factors. In addition, before the study and at the time of analysis, I received more exposure to a more inclusive society in New Zealand and inclusive learning cultures in the university I was undertaking my study, and also my daughters' elementary school, which helped to further increase my awareness on inclusion and diversity.

My professional and personal experiences are likely to impact and influence my involvement in this research. However, I have been mindful about this in order to ensure the analysis reflected the views of participants and observations made at the school context. This was addressed by the use of researcher journal, triangulation, and trying out ideas and themes on informants' and peer review.

### **3.8 Ethical considerations**

Ethics is important in educational research, because often subjects in such research involve human beings (Tuckman, 1972). According to Bogdan and Biklen (2007) and Fraenkel and Wallen (2009) some important ethical issues that need to be considered in research with human subjects are: informed consent, ensuring confidentiality of research data and protecting the rights of the participants.

For this research, ethical approval was obtained from the University of Canterbury Educational Research Human Ethics Committee (see Appendix E). In addition,

permission was sought from the Ministry of Education of the Maldives and the school principal before beginning to collect data (see Appendix F).

All the participants of the study were given accurate information about the study in written form. They were also informed that participation in the study was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any time without any penalty. Before interviews, information about the study was summarized, permission to audio tape the interview was assured and consent forms were collected. All the students were interviewed with permission and consent from their parents and themselves. Similarly, observation of the class was carried out after informed consent has been granted by the school principal, class teachers, the parents and students who were selected as participants for this study.

In addition, consideration was given to protect research participant's identities to ensure the information collected for the study does not harm them in any way. This was done by substituting the name of the setting and participants with pseudonyms. Additionally, any biographical information that may lead to identification of the participants was omitted in the final report. Particular care was also taken to ensure the confidentiality of all data gathered for this study. In this regard, during the analysis process, all the data was securely stored in password protected facilities and locked storage at the University of Canterbury.

### **3.9 Summary**

This chapter has outlined the methodology and methods used for the research. It also discussed how validity, reliability and ethical issues were addressed in the study. The next chapter will focus on the results of this study in light of data analysis.

# **Chapter Four: Findings - A tale of the change process**

## **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents findings from the case study of one urban school (grades 1-10) in Maldives, which was developing inclusive education. The structure of this chapter is as follows. The chapter begins with an overview of the school context (section 4.2). Next, a rich description of the process of moving towards inclusive education in the school is presented (section 4.3). In order to represent a clear picture of the process, initially their first attempt towards inclusive education is described followed by the recent steps and plans that were in place. This discussion includes data from three school leaders, (Sama, Hamid and Zeena); a student who at the time of the study was mainstreamed (Nooh); his parent (Ibrahim); four SEN teachers; two general teachers (Manik and Natha), and documents such as the school inclusion policy and handbook.

Next, in order to provide a description of how inclusive education looks inside the class, a snapshot of a grade five class that was accommodating students with SEN is then presented, providing details of the inclusive education experience of six teachers, three students with SEN and their parents (section 4.4). Data on this

section is based on the interviews with the three students (Ahmed, Ali and Moosa), their parents (Aishath, Fathima and Aminath) and their teachers (Manik, Haleem, Mary, Reena, Hawwa and Amira), classroom observation and documents such as the school record book, schemes of work and lesson plans.

## **4.2 School context**

Hilaalee School is one of the government schools (grades 1-10) that offer both special and general education for both girls and boys. At the time of the study, the school catered for 48 students with SEN in four separate classes while also accommodating students with moderate to mild SEN in the general classes although there were no statistics on students with SEN in those classes.

In Hilaalee School, education for students with SEN began in 2004, in segregated classrooms labeled as SEN classes that were aimed at providing educational opportunities for students ( age 7- 18) with mental impairments. These classes had resulted from the government's initial movement towards inclusion. There are SEN teachers, primary teachers as well as secondary teachers working in the school. This teacher population consists of both local and expatriate teachers.

Like many other schools in the Maldives, in order to acquire the maximum benefit of the space, two, three-storied buildings span the school's physical landscape. At the entrance, there are two doors, one with a ramp and the other without. The door

with the ramp is often kept closed and needs to be manually operated. The ground floor of the school consists of the school compound with barely any facilities except one football goal and a netball shoot, the SEN classes, the school office, school hall, music room, the supervisor's room and some toilets. Most of the classrooms and the school library, science laboratory, Audio Visual room, sports hall, Art room, computer lab and staffroom are located on the upper floors. Access to these upper floors is via two staircases located on the two sides of the building.

The classrooms in the school are fairly small, congested with rows of desks separated by a narrow passage. Each classroom has a blackboard, wooden tables and plastic chairs, one for each. The average numbers of students in the general education classes range from 30-35. Every day, students carry all the necessary text books and exercise books with stationary, in their bags and keep on the chairs they sit.

The school operates in two sessions, the morning session (6.45 am-11.45 am) and the afternoon session (12.45pm-5.45pm). The older students go to the morning session and the younger to the afternoon session. There are seven periods each day, each lasting 35 minutes and a 15 minute tea break between the fourth and fifth period. However, as Maldives is a Muslim country, during Ramadan (the fasting month), school sessions are operated for three hours each period lasting for 25 minutes. At the beginning of the school sessions, students get dropped off at



the school grounds but get collected from their class at the end of the sessions. Parents and teachers often use this time to exchange conversations about students.

Each school day begins with an assembly. For the assembly, all students line up in neat rows in the corridor or in the school hall (for mass assembly, which is held once a week or on special occasions). All the teachers and school leaders are also present in the assembly. The assembly begins with a selected student reciting an excerpt from the Holy Quran and its meaning, followed by all singing the school song. After that, there are general student notices, reminders and special announcements/messages which are made by the school principal, supervisors and sometimes students.

In lower primary grades (1-4), a class teacher takes over most of the teaching for her class while in higher grades (5-10) each subject is taught by a separate teacher. These teachers change from class to class while students remain in the class except for sessions taken outside the class such as music, Physical Education and laboratory computer sessions. The primary teachers follow the national syllabus and the secondary teachers, the secondary curriculum that leads to the external examination (General Certificate for Secondary Education) and the SEN teachers a scheme designed by the leading teacher and SEN teachers. The medium of instruction is English, except for religious studies and Dhivehi (language of Maldivians).

Many extracurricular activities are organized throughout the academic year for the students. These include uniform bodies such as Cub Scout and Little Maids, Girl Guides, school band. Other than the uniform bodies, the school organizes literary activities such as reading, writing and reciting competitions. Over the years, there have been some changes to the school including changes in school principals. Some significant changes that took place in the year the study was carried out include the beginning of secondary education with the introduction of grade eight classes, change of the school principal and the steps taken towards inclusion.

While working towards the vision, “a world class school”, Hilaalee School’s mission is to:

- set high standards, expectations and meet them
- ingrain in students a love for Islam and pride in their identity
- become techno savvy
- address the differentiated needs of all students
- work to ensure positive behaviour management in every class for every student
- commit to work in partnership with the parent community
- strive for excellence and overall development of each student
- make the school an enjoyable place for every student.

(School handbook, 2011, p. 1)

## **4.3 The movement towards inclusive education**

### **4.3.1 Inclusion as a trial**

Two years after the establishment of the SEN unit, Hilaalee School commenced its first movement towards inclusive education by mainstreaming a few students from the SEN unit as a trial. This was initiated by the school leader Sama who was in-charge of grade five and the SEN unit. According to Sama, when she took over the responsibilities of the SEN unit, she had no interest or training in SEN. However, realizing the need for some knowledge if any support is to be provided for the SEN teachers and students, Sama worked on her own on professional development. While this increased her knowledge, it also developed her interest towards SEN.

“Later during a school break I thought I would find more about SEN. So I did my own research by asking people about it and through reading. I did not undergo any special training. “However, I attended the workshops held for SEN teachers and learned from those. It is only by reading I learnt how to identify a child with autism and how to deal with Down syndrome. Later I shared this information with the SEN teachers too.”  
(Interview, Sama)

“By then I had developed interest too and wanted to leave the normal grade and take over SEN. Since 2006 I have been working only as a SEN supervisor.” (Interview, Sama)

Reflecting on how the process began, Sama explained that the decision to mainstream some of the students from the SEN classes was driven by the strengths of students from the SEN classes (some students were good at certain subjects) and her previous experience (teaching students who were integrated from the Hearing Impaired (HI) classes in her previous school). Hence, sharing her thoughts with the school head then, the first attempt towards inclusive education was made:

“We thought it might work. One day, I and Aysha (the school head then) discussed about this. We decided we would try. We started to see if our students can also be sent to the grade classes for at least some subjects.” (Interview, Sama)

Elaborating on these initial steps towards inclusive education, Sama added that the mainstreaming began without much preparation other than deciding on five students and the classes to mainstream them in. She also noted that practices such as developing IEPs, discussing with general teachers or creating awareness did not take place. According to Sama, however, she had certain criteria while selecting the students as well as the general classes to mainstream those students. She also

emphasized that these decisions had to be made considering the limited knowledge and awareness about inclusion among the school community, including herself. With regard to the teacher's criteria she explained:

“When we send these students we looked for teachers from the normal grades who were good and would work with corporation with these students. Teachers who could work with patience can only work with these students.” (Interview, Sama)

Her explanation for student criteria was:

“I selected the best five (good academically in subject areas) because then, I did not know that mainstreaming should allow flexibility in the curriculum.” (Interview, Sama)

Sama also noted that the selected students were sent for the whole year though not on a regular basis and added that the main facilitators of the mainstreaming were the support of two teachers from grade five (Natha and Manik).

“We sent the students to few classes but some teachers were not cooperative so the students went to Natha's and Manik's as did it with interest.” (Interview, Sama)

The following describes the experience of Natha and Manik, with the students mainstreamed to their class.

According to Natha, students who came from the SEN classes loved her and her class for many reasons: she loved them; her classroom environment was child friendly with books and toys; other students were helpful to them and she had a good relationship with their parents. She also added that she gave work according to their level and involved them in activities they enjoyed such as presenting advertisements that they have seen on television.

According to her other strategies she used with those students was allowing them to present in their own language when they had difficulty expressing it in English and using equipment from the library such as the shapes to work especially with them. She further elaborated on how she taught English to those students.

“I gave them work according to their level. So I started with Radiant way books, first step, and second step like that. I taught them letters and sounds first and used double ruled books to teach them to write letters.”  
(Interview, Natha)

Natha also talked about having interest in working with students with SEN and how she out of interest visits the SEN classes and spends time with them.

Like Natha, Manik also shared his experience with students from the SEN classes. He reported that students from his class were very helpful and supportive to those students. He believes the importance of providing these students support. He

talked about the different ways he supported these students in his class. He described how he tried to include the mainstreamed students by giving work at the student's level or with different materials and methods. He noted:

“I was teaching Dhivehi in grade five. These students are not to the class level, so I bring work sheets set for grade one, two and three whenever they are available. For example, there will be tasks such as colouring objects that begin with the letter. I used what is available from school that fits to their level. To read also I give simple ones for example, I still can remember "Hudhu Musalhu" (White Rabbit) a very short story. I used to give it to the SEN student who came to my class and he used to read it.”  
(Interview, Manik)

He further added how he catered for the SEN student who had difficulty in learning things by memory.

“He finds it difficult to keep things in mind for longer but he shows interest in doing many things. He finds by hearting difficult. So I never told him to recite by looking or by heart. Instead I gave him the choice. The parts that he knew by heart were recited by memory but others by looking.” (Interview, Manik)

Manik also talked about how he increased the participation of these students in the class by giving opportunities to take part in areas they showed interest.

“For example the child who wants to recite Dhivehi poems and present Dhivehi stories, I always give him the opportunity because I believe support can be given through tasks he wanted to do.” (Interview, Manik)

Perhaps this positive attitude of Manik would account for his interest in teaching students with SEN, which he expressed at the end of the interview.

#### **4.3.1.1 The positives**

With mainstreaming, a few students from the SEN classes got the opportunity to get access to the general education system. Sama expressed this as an advantage because in the SEN classes students have less opportunities to learn subject matter because their main focus is on developing basic skills.

“One student did very well in Quran when mainstreamed. In the SEN classes he did not have the opportunity because we do not follow a curriculum.” (Interview, Sama)

Sama added another advantage by stating:

“This way, I believe the SEN students will get the opportunity to learn to be with those without SEN.” (Interview, Sama).

She further added that with mainstreaming, the general education teachers and students realized the potential of students with SEN.



“Mainstream students realized that students from the SEN classes are also capable. One student did very well in Quran. He did not have the opportunity in the SEN class because we do not have a curriculum in the SEN class as we were told that students from the SEN class do not need to be taught knowledge.” (Interview, Sama)

Likewise Manik noted that when students with SEN are integrated, those without SEN become aware of strengths of student with SEN.

“These students try to learn things from SEN students. For example, whenever they notice anything positive from a SEN student, they call me and tell me about it.” (Interview, Manik)

Other than that student’s interests in attending general classes was pointed by the school leaders, teachers and parents. Sama noted that most of the students liked going to the general education classes.

Consistently, Natha talked about students with SEN being motivated and enjoying her class.

“The SEN class children were highly motivated in my class.” (Interview, Natha).

Similarly, Nooh’s father expressed Nooh’s interest in attending the general classes by stating:

“He likes to be in the general class. He was not happy when he was transferred to the SEN class but now is feeling better when he is mainstreamed for some subjects.” (Interview, Ibrahim)

According to Ibrahim, the main reason Nooh dislikes the SEN class is because the work which is not challenging for him and Nooh considers them as ‘too simple’. Apart from the above positive outcomes, Sama noted that in the mainstreaming process one student was fully mainstreamed while another student was transferred through the mainstream to a secondary school (before secondary education began in Hilaalee School) and another student has been fully transferred to a grade five class.

#### **4.3.1.2 The challenges**

Notwithstanding the positives, several challenges existed. This would be discussed in the light of the inclusion experience of Nooh who was mainstreamed for two subjects to a grade eight class in 2011. The main challenge Nooh had to face related to the attitudinal barriers from students, parents as well as teachers. Elaborating on these challenges, Sama reported how the negative attitude of some students and parents affect inclusion of Nooh. According to her some of the students did not like his presence and hence blocked his entry to the class, teased and bullied him as stated in the quote below:

“He told that they (students) start laughing whenever he started to talk and laughed for anything he did.” (Interview, Sama)

Consistently, Nooh’s father Ibrahim noted the different ways Nooh was bullied in the general classes.

“Many problems have occurred because of things that other students did. Sometimes students have thrown things at him in a way that he did not know who did it. Sometimes students have teased him by saying things such as “fatty” because he is fat and other times they have made faces at him.” (Interview, Ibrahim)

However, Ibrahim noted that bullying in Hilaalee School was less compared to the other schools Nooh attended. Ibrahim thought the reason could be the presence of the SEN unit and students being more aware and tolerant to students with SEN.

With regard to parents’ negative attitudes, Sama commented that parents misunderstand Nooh’s difficulties and did not want their children to sit with him in the class.

“Some of the general education parents view Nooh as a student with very bad behaviour, or disobedient or mad. They view him as one of the three and do not want their children to sit with him. Therefore there is nobody sitting with him in the class.” (Interview, Sama)

Similar comments were made by Ibrahim. According to him often parents complained about him and in extreme cases request the school to change class.

Likewise, some teachers misunderstood Nooh while others did not pay the same attention they paid to other students in the class. Giving an example of such instance, Zeena noted:

“Some teachers just take him as a visitor. They neither see if he did any work nor marked his books.” (Interview, Zeena)

The other challenge faced by Nooh was associated with lack of adaptations brought to the curriculum and assessments to accommodate him. As a result, Nooh talked about having difficulty coping with the content and the pace of its delivery.

“I like grade class better but what I study in this class is very different and sometimes I find it difficult. Teachers write the lessons on the board and I find it too fast and it is quite hard for me.” (Interview, Nooh)

Consistently, Ibrahim noted that with Nooh’s short attention span, he had difficulty completing the test papers without extra time and assistance. According to Ibrahim, often, Nooh was able to concentrate and complete the first few pages of a test paper. Therefore, he discussed Nooh’s difficulty with the school management requesting to allow him more time. It was also noted that there was

no positive response from the school yet. Ibrahim, however, justified his point by stating:

“Sometimes he does the first two pages and scribbles the rest but if he is given more time he would do better.” (Interview, Ibrahim)

From the above discussion, the main barriers that challenged inclusive education at the trial stage are clear. However, some participants were also able to talk about the major challenges in their first attempt at inclusion. These included lack of knowledge and positive understanding about inclusion among the school community, the lack of flexibility in school structures, teacher-student ratio, lack of resources and lack of collaboration between the SEN and general staff.

**a. *Lack of knowledge and understanding about inclusion***

The lack of knowledge and positive understanding about inclusion among the school community, including the school leaders, teachers, parents and students was reported as the major obstacle to inclusion at the trial stage.

Hamid noted that the two main reasons why inclusion was not successful earlier: the lack of knowledge and experience about inclusion among the staff and lack of awareness among students.

“Inclusive education was started in the school earlier as well but was not successful. One main reason for this was the staffs were untrained (in

terms of SEN/ Inclusion). Even the top management needs to be trained. They need to learn how it (inclusion) is done in other places. Nobody has seen how inclusion is done, they only hear about it, no experience.” (Interview, Hamid)

“Inclusive education was not successful in the school when they started it earlier because students from the mainstream classes were not made aware.” (Interview, Hamid)

Hamid further noted that due to the lack of awareness, some students ignored the students with SEN while others felt sorry for them and helped them too much.

Similarly, Sama pointed out that the main reason inclusion was not successful at the trial stage was due to their lack of knowledge about inclusion. According to her, without knowledge about inclusion, she herself as the leading teacher in charge of the SEN unit was not able to tell the general education teachers what might occur and failed to give proper guidance to them.

“We had to stop sending the SEN students because we did not know how to help them (general education teachers). When we did not know, we were not able to tell the teachers about it. Without the knowledge, we could not convince the teachers that this can be done.” (Interview, Sama)

Sama also noted that the lack of knowledge and negative attitude of some general education teachers acted as a barrier to inclusion at the trial stage. According to her some teachers showed unwillingness to accept students from the SEN unit into their classrooms, mainly because these students had different behaviour and did not meet the class standard. Sama elaborated on this further with two examples.

“One of the students who were mainstreamed was showing lot of progress in academic areas. However, due to the behaviour issue she had, teachers were reluctant to include her. Another student, Shaif, he really wanted to study in a general class but we had to stop mainstreaming him because teachers thought he did not have the class standard and was over aged for the class.” (Interview, Sama)

Parent’s lack of awareness and negative understanding about inclusion was also reported as an obstacle for the inclusion of students with SEN. Hamid noted that because of the negative attitude towards SEN, some parents do not want be told that their child needs special education. Likewise, Sama noted that some parents did not want their children to have any connections to students with SEN.

**b. *Student-teacher ratio***

Student-teacher ratio was reported as an obstacle for inclusion by school leaders and SEN teachers. According to Hamid one of the challenges faced in mainstreaming was lack of help provided to the mainstreamed students because of

the large number of students in the mainstream classes. The solution for this, he believes is additional teacher (s) in the class.

“With the large number of students the problem can be only solved with assistant teachers in the classes. In primary classes like grade one, there are 34 students. In grades two and three, there are 30 students in each class. In this case, a teacher does not even have a minute for each child in the 35 minutes period.” (Interview, Hamid).

Pointing out that inclusion would be difficult with one teacher in a general education class, a SEN teacher added.

“If there are two teachers we can do inclusion. All level of students needs guidance. One teacher would not be able to do everything, giving work different levels, attending children’s discipline problems and behaviour problems.” (Interview, SEN teachers’ focus group)

Another SEN teacher added that the main problem with student-teacher ratio arises from general teachers’ lack of flexibility with time, the curriculum, and content. Based on her experience as a general teacher and currently an SEN teacher she noted that unlike SEN teachers, general teachers do not have the flexibility to work at students’ level and pace because,

“When a general teacher enters the class what has to be covered the whole week is pre planned based on the curriculum and scheme of work. Unless



she completes these, her responsibilities are not considered as attended. Sometimes the work set is a lot to cover in 35 minutes.” (Interview, SEN teachers’ focus group)

In this case, according to her, teachers concentrate on the majority of students and give emphasis on covering the set content within the allocated time.

### ***c. School structure***

Another obstacle that challenged inclusion at trial stage was the lack of flexibility available in mainstreaming the SEN students, especially those from the lower grades. This was because all the SEN classes came in the morning session while all the general education lower grades came in the afternoon session. This required SEN students who were mainstreamed for the lower grades and their teachers to come to both sessions. However, this became an issue when most of the SEN teachers started their studies.

“What happened was when teachers starting the diploma course they got busy and some found it difficult to come in the afternoon. This was one reason why we could not continue sending them to the lower grade classes.” (Interview, Sama)

#### **d. Resources**

The school leaders and teachers consistently commented on the lack of human resources as a significant barrier to inclusion. This lack of human resources was mainly discussed in relation to the limited SEN teachers in the school, absence of paraprofessionals to work with the general teachers and unavailability of professionals such as speech therapists and physiotherapists. Hamid described how lack of human resources act as one of the main challenges faced in moving towards inclusive education.

“A student from grade one has been identified with a speech problem. He can speak but has difficulty with sound production. The teacher needs to provide him speech therapy for which we do not have a trained staff.”  
(Interview, Hamid)

Similarly, Sama discussed how the lack of human resources such as SEN teachers and therapists affect inclusion. She noted that some students from the SEN classes have been selected for mainstreaming but the process is at hold until they get some additional teachers to work with these students in the general classes. In addition, she added that her observations of students with SEN in general classes made her realize further the need for extra teachers.

“I went to two to three classes in the afternoon session and I found out that help can be provided only with extra teachers.” (Interview, Sama)

Sama however, noted that it would not be possible to get extra SEN teachers because of the scarcity of SEN teachers in the country.

***e. Lack of collaboration between the SEN and general staff***

When the students were mainstreamed, there was lack of relationship between the SEN and general staff. The main reason for this was described by the school leaders as follows:

“Many view the SEN unit in the school as a different school. They do not consider it as part of the school.” (Interview, Hamid)

“Here the SEN unit is very much separated. It is like a separate department. It is called the SEN department”. (Interview, Sama)

Due to this separation the SEN teachers and general teachers had different roles. SEN teachers were only responsible for students from the SEN classes and the general teachers for those who are in the general classes. As a result there was no collaboration between the two groups. Hence, when students were mainstreamed they were sent to the classes without proper information or any support from the SEN teachers.

“I do not get any information about the students. What I only know is he is a student with SEN. Actually if we are given information, it would be easier to understand the students need.” (Interview, Manik)

Expressing dissatisfaction when students are mainstreamed without necessary information and support, another teacher added:

“We should have been provided with some background information such as his areas of difficulties .We were not given any information at all. One day he suddenly appeared in the class. When I talked to him he said he is a student from the SEN class. That is all I knew. I am not talking about giving information about inclusive education theories but information about the students and what difficulties he has. It would have been better if we were provided with support from SEN staff.” (Notes from the awareness session)

The school leader Sama’s explanation for the lack of information and support provided to the general teachers was two-fold. Firstly, because of their lack of knowledge about inclusive education and she believed that providing the information would not be of any help as general teacher do not have knowledge about SEN.

### **4.3.2 Inclusion as a plan**

According to Sama, although the trial stage was challenging, she found it useful and important, hence was eager to move the school further towards inclusion. She also explained how she began her inclusive education plan.

“In 2010, many changes were brought to the school by the school head then. The vision was Hilaalee School to be a world class school. To achieve this everyone worked very hard with roles assigned to them. Different targets were set. Activities for improving English and Mathematics were included but not inclusion. I discussed with Mary (the school head) to include inclusive education. She told me that she would do everything she could to help me achieve this target. So I began the planning.” (Interview, Sama).

#### **4.3.2.1 The process**

The process began with Sama writing an inclusion policy for the school. This was initiated with suggestions and support from a Facebook friend who had lot of passion for inclusion.

“I wrote the inclusion policy with the help of a lady who I met while playing FarmVille on Facebook. When chatting with her online, I found that she had lot of interest in inclusion and SEN. She helped me a lot in writing the policy. She told me that we can develop inclusion and helped develop the inclusion policy.” (Interview, Sama).

Sama reported that she further developed the inclusion policy with suggestions from the consultant, who was at school for six months, to help with the overall development of the school while achieving the “world class” vision. She also noted that it was during this time that the government started steps towards inclusive education and the term “inclusion” started appearing on government documents for the first time in history. According to her, the first such document was the “Baraabaruu School” (ideal school) document from the Ministry of Education which consisted inclusion as one of the indicators of a “Baraabaruu” school. She added that this required all schools to be inclusive.

Sama also talked about a programme organized from the Ministry of Education for the school leaders and personnel from the Ministry for which herself and Hamid was part of. According to her, the aim of the programme was to enhance knowledge and awareness about inclusive education. She also noted that this programme involved attending some sessions on inclusive education and visiting schools to observe inclusive education in practise in Australia. Sama reported that this exposure to the knowledge and practise gave her confidence and motivated her further. She also explained how this helped her.

“After coming from the inclusion programme in Australia in 2011, I made presentations and started work around inclusion again on my own. When I saw inclusion there, I was sure we can also do. I still continue to communicate with the teacher from the main school from Australia. I

share my presentations with her too. I add things that she recommends. I share and get my teachers to use some of the techniques they use in their school also.” (Interview, Sama).

With the support from Hamid and SEN teachers, work around making the school more inclusive began in 2011. The main focus was removing the barriers that challenged the trial stage.

#### **4.3.2.2 The steps taken**

##### **a. *Enhancing knowledge and understanding about inclusion***

To enhance knowledge and understanding about inclusion among the school community, awareness sessions were planned for students, teachers and parents.

Zeena and Hamid talked about why the awareness sessions had to begin:

“Because of the issues that came up with the inclusion of Nooh, we have decided not to mainstream any more students without raising awareness among teachers, students and parents.” (Interview, Zeena)

“The student (Nooh), who was mainstreamed for grade eight without any awareness for his classmates, had many issues. Therefore, awareness programs have been in place for the class now.” (Interview, Hamid)

The first such awareness session was for the teachers from Nooh’s general class and was facilitated by Sama and an SEN teacher. This session consisted of information about disability, SEN and inclusive education. In the session

disability was defined as deficits from birth which make people disabled in certain ways.

“Different people are disabled in different ways. A person could be disabled physically, sensory or mentally. This means they have certain things that they cannot do due to a birth deficit”. (Notes from the awareness session)

Following this definition, it was noted that disabilities cannot be fully cured and teachers might not be able to teach students with disabilities at other students’ level. However, it was stressed that there are some things that could be done to improve the situation for the child such as providing glasses to visually impaired students. The facilitators also noted the different levels of disability and believed that students with mild difficulties can easily be included.

“Every disability is categorized into four levels. They are mild, moderate, and severe and profound. It would not be difficult to cope with mild cases in the normal classes.” (Notes from the awareness session)

In the session, it was discussed that students with behaviour problems, difficulty with memorizing and learning, and those who are gifted and talented could be considered as students with SEN. However, it was emphasized not to consider all students with SEN as having a disability because:



“According to research in an average class there are about two or three students who are slow and might be having learning disabilities or difficulties. These students surely fit into the category of SEN but we should not consider them as coming with a disability because they could be helped in the class provided with some support.” (Notes from the awareness session)

The session communicated inclusive education as education of students with SEN in general classes. The facilitators stressed that the ultimate goal of inclusive education is to help students with SEN to become part of the society.

“Sometimes students with SEN can manage to maintain the class standard. However, even if they are weaker than that, they should be helped to manage in the society at least. This could be the main aim of inclusive education.” (Notes from the awareness session)

Given that, teachers were encouraged not to leave students with SEN unattended in the classes. Teachers were also reminded that students with mild SEN were already in the general classes and failure to attend to those students would leave them having nothing to do in the society. After that, teachers were informed that soon additional teachers would be supporting students with SEN in the general classes. In the meantime, usage of strategies such as peer support was recommended.

“It is good to use the other students to help them. You can use the bright students in the class as their peer teachers.” (Notes from the awareness session)

Teachers seemed to have found the session useful. At the end of the session, one teacher said:

“This session is quite a good session. I wonder why this session is only for teachers of one class.” (Notes from the awareness session)

Likewise, an awareness session was also held with the students from the class Nooh attended. This session was conducted by Sama. According to Sama, she began the session with pictures of famous people like Tom Cruise who were not good in studies but were later successful in life. She noted that, in the session, she emphasized that students with SEN also have strengths and were capable but needed support from others such as classmates. Sama reported that at the end of the awareness session, students’ attitude towards Nooh changed. She also noted that the students agreed with supporting Nooh and recommended to have an awareness session for teachers as well.

Other than the awareness sessions, professional development programs were conducted for the staff to enhance their knowledge and understanding about inclusion. Hamid believes that it is important for the school leaders to be trained

hence two members from the senior management had been sent to Singapore and Australia to observe inclusive education in those countries.

Similarly, SEN teachers have been given the opportunity to visit some inclusive schools in Sri Lanka, Bangalore and Singapore. Moreover, currently, ten SEN teachers and Sama are completing a Diploma in Special education.

“At the moment staff training is taking place. Teachers have been sent on short term training too, like all SEN teachers have been sent to Sri Lanka for one week training. All the SEN teachers are now doing Diploma in Special Education.” (Interview, Hamid).

According to Sama, all the SEN teachers who attend the diploma in special education programme have regular meetings with those who do not attend in order to share the new things they learn from their training.

With regards to general education teacher’s professional development, a session on autism was conducted by a SEN teacher, which one general teacher noted as useful.

“Recently a SEN teacher took a very good session for all the teachers on a school professional development day. It was a very interesting session. It was about how to identify autistic students and what their needs are like. I learned a lot from this session.” (Interview, Manik)

### **b. *Increasing Human Resources***

Student teacher ratio was reported as a significant barrier for inclusion in the school. Therefore, five general teachers were recruited especially to work for inclusion. According to Zeena, each of these teachers would be attached to a SEN teacher and a SEN class. In addition, they would be working in the general classes for four days a week, helping the mainstreamed student and other students who may need help. However, Sama noted that only one teacher had started coming and that she had been given necessary information and experience.

“At the moment we are giving her basic information about inclusivity and getting her to spend about two weeks with the student we are providing inclusion for.” (Interview, Sama)

Sama also stressed the school’s plan to find a speech therapist and a physiotherapist.

### **c. *Whole school approach***

Data indicate that when inclusion was at trial, only few staff were involved and no formal discussions with the school community took place. However, Sama reported that recently, the school inclusion policy was shared in the staff meeting with all the school staff. With this, developing inclusive education in the school was made everyone’s responsibility. This policy refers to how the needs of all children in the school are addressed by stating,

“A school inclusion policy will refer to how the needs of all children in school are addressed, including those with special needs, gifted and talented, raising achievements, including travellers’ children, ethnic minorities, and asylum seekers.” (p. 1)

The policy emphasizes the importance of providing effective learning opportunities for all pupils and states three main principles for inclusion. They are:

- Setting suitable learning challenges
- Responding to pupils diverse learning needs

Overcoming potential barriers to learning and assessment for individuals and groups of people

(School Inclusion Policy, p.1)

**d. *Building an inclusive school culture***

***i) Providing equal opportunities***

One of the steps taken to make the school culture more inclusive was the plan to provide more educational opportunities for students from the SEN classes.

“Inclusivity means providing equal opportunities for all the children. Therefore, the target now is to mainstream students from the SEN classes.” (Interview, Hamid)

With this, Hamid noted that students from the SEN classes would be spending more time in the general classes and coming to the SEN classes for a few hours.

He further added that the necessary preparations such as developing IEPs, meeting the general education teachers, parents, training of extra teachers and awareness sessions for the teachers and students were in place. Hamid also talked about what was planned to make sure all students are mainstreamed and none of them would have to come for both sessions.

“Primary grades and SEN classes would be split to both sessions next year, so all SEN students will get the opportunity to go to mainstream classes from the session they attend.” (Interview, Hamid)

In a similar vein, Zeena noted the arrangements planned for students who would be mainstreamed for more than one subject.

“Some students can come for two subjects and more. Therefore, we are going to organize the time table in a way that these students would not have to come twice. We will have the subjects in a row so that they would not have to go and come back.” (Interview, Zeena)

It is important to note that the plan to mainstream all the students for one subject would leave with no student being full time in a SEN class.

Additionally, Sama noted that students from the SEN classes had been given equal opportunities to many other school activities as she described in the quote below.

“SEN students now get chances to recite Quran and to give speeches in the school assembly. They are also involved in Cadet, Scout, Dhivehi Club (DLA), Fehimala and Sports Council.” (Interview, Sama)

Other than the educational opportunities, planning school activities together for students from the SEN classes and the general education classes was another step taken to make the school culture more inclusive. The school leaders and the teachers reported that unlike in the past, recently, activities had been planned together for students from the SEN unit and the general classes. Sama expressed how happy she was to see school events been organized together for students from the SEN classes and those from the general classes. Elaborating on this, she highlighted the last school anniversary celebration in particular.

“This time in the school anniversary, the sports meet was held together for the SEN students and the normal grades. SEN students took part in all the activities together with normal grade students. Activities on stage were also done together. I am very happy with how things went on the anniversary celebration. Everything went together for the SEN students and the grade classes Therefore, this event was very inclusive. This was the first time in their life having an inclusive anniversary celebration.” (Interview, Sama)

*ii) Building the relationship between the SEN and general staff*

Building the relationship between the SEN and general staff adds to the list of things done to make the school more inclusive. This was done through connecting the SEN unit to the school system and creating opportunities that encourage interaction and collaboration of SEN staff and general staff. Hamid reported the initial steps taken to develop the relationship between the two groups.

“Now I am trying to coordinate. Deputy Principal has been appointed to look after issues related to SEN. And now with the deputy principal, she has the opportunity to have a say and share things at school policy level.”  
(Interview, Hamid).

In addition, Hamid talked about how he had cancelled the separate meetings for the SEN staff and got them to attend the general discussion meetings every Thursday. This was done because Hamid believed that the interaction between the general and SEN staff would increase, at the same time, build the relationship between the two groups.

As a result, there was evidence of increased relationship and collaboration between the SEN and general staff. Sama talked about her recent visits to the general classes with the intention of establishing a way to help students with SEN from those classes. She also noted that it was planned that SEN teachers would



start working in general classes in helping the mainstreamed students as well as others who may need help. This way, students with SEN from the general classes would be supported in the class instead of being transferred to a SEN class. Additionally, general teachers would receive support from SEN teachers. As for SEN teachers, this way, they could share their expertise and extend their support to a larger group of students and teachers.

This section described the steps taken by the school in their efforts to be inclusive. It was clear that education for students with SEN began in the school, in special classes that functioned in isolation. However, inclusion resulted from mainstreaming students from these classes. The first attempt toward inclusive education initiated by Sama was a trial that involved only a few students and teachers from the school. Based on the lessons learned from this trial, the school has begun their plans to move the school further towards inclusion. In this regard, initial attempts have been made to develop knowledge and awareness about inclusion among the school community, increasing human resources, developing an inclusion policy and creating an inclusive school culture.

The table below summarizes the movement towards inclusion during the two phases.

*Table 4: Summary of the movement towards inclusion in the two phases*

Inclusion as a trial	Inclusion as a plan
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mainstreaming</li> <li>• To see how well students from the SEN classes coped in the general education</li> <li>• Few school leaders and teachers involved</li> <li>• Only few students were mainstreamed</li> <li>• No collaboration between the SEN and general staff</li> <li>• Focus on placement only</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mainstreaming</li> <li>• To give equal opportunities for students from the SEN classes</li> <li>• All students to be mainstreamed</li> <li>• Collaboration between the SEN and general staff</li> <li>• Focus on participation and removal of barriers</li> </ul>

#### **4.4 A snapshot of a general class**

Having discussed the steps already taken and those that are planned in order to develop inclusive education at the whole school in general, here I intend to discuss the experiences of inclusive education from one general class. This class was one of the grade five classes in the school. The class consisted of 24 children, out of which 14 were boys and 10 were girls. The class was taught by nine

teachers, each teacher for a different subject, except the class teacher who taught two subjects.

The school leaders noted this class as the only class with a student who had been fully mainstreamed from the SEN unit. He is Ali who was diagnosed with Autism and had spent one year in the SEN unit. Later, it was found that Ahmed, the only student who was coming to school in a wheelchair belonged to this class. Ahmed had muscular dystrophy and started using a wheel chair two years back. Moosa from this class had no official diagnosis but the class teachers considered him as having behaviour problems and kept him separate in the class. Therefore, the main discussions would be about these students.

Data on this chapter is based on the interviews with three students (Ahmed, Ali and Moosa), their parents (Aishath, Fathima and Aminath) and their teachers (Manik, Haleem, Mary, Reena, Hawwa and Amira), classroom observation and documents such as the school record book, schemes of work and lesson plans.

#### **4.4.1 Teachers' understanding of SEN**

Teachers seemed to be unaware that there were any students with SEN in their classes. In the school culture, where there were classes for students with SEN, these teachers understood that students with SEN were only limited to those classes. Some teachers explained:

“There are classes for SEN students and I never thought that such a student would be in a normal class”. (Interview, Haleem)

Another teacher added:

“All these days I never knew there was any student with SEN in this class. I never thought Ali is a SEN student. I thought he is just a weak student. It’s almost a year now and even I was not told by anyone. What I am trying to say is that I was not even provided that information from the school”. (Interview, Manik)

The teachers further explained their understanding of SEN and some even provided definitions. They described students who are capable of learning as those having no SEN, hence, considered them as “normal students”. Some of the participants elaborated on this and related this to the cognitive ability of students. Therefore, students without SEN or normal students were described as intelligent, have the ability to learn, understand, memorize, and do well in studies. On the other hand, students with SEN were generally understood as students with an intellectual or sensory disability such as hearing and visual impairment that would affect their ability to learn. However, as the SEN unit in Hilaalee School is specialized for students with intellectual impairments, some of the participants perceived students with intellectual disabilities, especially those with obvious

features as the only students with SEN. It was for this reason none of the teachers from the class considered Ali, Ahmed or Moosa as students with SEN.

“I never thought Ali is a student with SEN. I thought he is just weak. SEN students are not just weak but they are different. They have an intellectual disability.” (Interview, Haleem).

“I did not consider Ahmed as a SEN student because he only cannot walk. I know he needs help because he cannot walk. I understand SEN students as students having intellectual disabilities but Ahmed is not. This is the way the school communicates too. When I told about the effect of Ahmed’s irregular attendance on his marks and its impact on the class average, from the school management, I was told that he is not a student with any intellectual disabilities. So based on the criteria the school uses, I never considered Ahmed as SEN student.” (Interview, Manik)

“For me Moosa is normal. He is a very intelligent boy, the only thing is he is very talkative and has bad behaviour.” (Interview, Mary)

Teachers also defined SEN as deficits in students and believed these students are not able to do things ‘normal’ students can do. They also understood that students with SEN need a lot of care. One teacher noted:

“Students with SEN need more care than normal students.” (Interview, Mary)

Another teacher noted:

“Students with SEN need special care and cannot do some activities normally.” (Interview, Reena)

As a result, some teachers and students were found to be feeling pity for Ahmed. While students tried to help him too much, teachers did not seem to emphasize him to do the class work because they felt sorry for him and that it would pressure him.

“Ahmed can’t do anything. We can’t shout at him because we feel sorry for him and we can’t pressure students like that.” (Interview, Reena).

“From Ahmed’s grade four teachers, I came to know that his condition is getting worse so I do not want to pressure him to do much.” (Interview, Haleem).

The researcher’s observations in the field revealed consistent findings. It was found that students even did things that Ahmed was capable of doing.

When the teacher told the class to take their books, the girl next to Ahmed took the book from Ahmed’s bag for him (field notes).

#### **4.4.2 Teachers’ attitude towards inclusion**

Generally, teachers understood inclusive education as educating students with SEN in general classes. However, teachers had different opinions to it. Some

teachers thought all students should have equal opportunities in school as everyone has the rights to education. For instance, Manik believes that students with SEN are also part of the society and they should get the opportunity to learn and attend school. He also added that these students should get equal opportunities in the school. He further expressed his opinion in relation to Ahmed's case.

“Ahmed does not get the opportunity to go to the library. He also cannot move in the class or go out like others. It is his right to move from one group to the other and going out to play. Since I started coming to this class, I always feel that he is not getting some of his rights and opportunities that other students get.” (Interview, Manik)

Similarly, in Hawwa's opinion, students with SEN should be taught in the general classes and they should be provided with equal opportunities. However, she noted that Ahmed in her class misses many opportunities that others in the class have. As an example she noted:

“Today's English lesson was in the AV room but I had to keep Ahmed in the class because he cannot be taken upstairs.” (Interview, Hawwa)

In contrast, some teachers believed that students who had severe difficulties in learning should be taught in separate classes. For instance, Mary believed that Ali should not be fully mainstreamed.

“Ali should be mainstreamed only for subjects he is good. I am against the opinion of keep him in the general class all the time because he is very weak.” (Interview, Mary)

Another teacher, Reena shared a similar view. According to her, Ali was very difficult to teach so he would be better off in a SEN class.

“Before leaving the class Reena came to me and told me," I think he should be kept in the SEN class. One teacher has to be with him. He is not capable because he can't remember. When given the same type of work he can do but after few days he forgets. It is difficult to teach him in this class. (Field notes)

### **4.4.3 Main challenges faced by the teachers**

#### **4.4.3.1 Lack of time**

The majority of the teachers reported lack of time as the main challenge when having students who needed extra help. Teachers also reported that often students, who were slow learners and weak in studies, were not able to do the class work and got left out in the class because:

“In a 35 minutes period, it is hard to find time for students with SEN.”  
(Interview, Hawwa)



The main reason for not having enough time for students with SEN was discussed in relation to having to follow strictly the schemes of work, time tables and text books. It was observed that all the teachers followed the national curriculum. This curriculum specified the content to be covered for each subject, the amount of time (periods) to be allocated for teaching the subject and the national standards to be met at the end of each grade. Based on this, the school had common schemes of work prepared with details of the content to be covered each period as shown below.

*Table 5: one period from scheme of work*

<u>Topic</u>	<u>Objectives</u>	<u>Level</u>	<u>Procedure</u>	<u>Activity</u>
Decimals Reading and interpreting decimals	To be able to read and interpret decimal numbers up to 2 decimal place	Knowledge  Application	*Use blocks or abacus or place value cards and introduce decimals.  *Explain decimal point and the place value of different numbers  *Let students do pp. 2- 3	Answering

While following the schemes, teachers also followed time tables of 35 minutes as shown in the table below.

*Table 6: A day from the class Time Table*

<u>Time</u>	<u>Sunday</u>
1.40-2.15	English
2.15-2.50	Quran
2.50-3.25	English
3.25-4.00	Maths
4.00-4.15	BREAK
4.15-4.50	Library
4.50-5.25	E.S
5.25-6.10	Dhivehi

Teachers were expected to strictly follow the national syllabus and cover the content on time. This is stated as follows under teachers' duties on teachers' record books for 2011.

- Teach as per syllabus and coordination meetings. Cover the allocated portion for each term on time.
- Teach according to the prescribed timetable.

(P.11)

This seemed to limit time for the teachers to spend individual time for those who needed additional help.

“The main challenge is that these students are not able to participate in the lessons at the standard we take them but we don’t get time to help them. For example, in grade five students are expected to read Quran fluently but when these students can’t read we have to teach them letters but we do not have time for that.” (Interview, Haleem)

As a result teachers seemed to give more emphasis on content delivery than to attending to needs of students. One teacher noted:

“We have to follow the scheme and complete the set lessons within the allocated time even if the students understand it or not.” (Interview, Mary).

Teachers also reported that they felt guilty for not been able to give proper attention to those students but noted that without another teacher to help them, it was not easy to find time for students who needed individual attention.

#### **4.4.3.2 Lack of support**

Other than time, some teachers talked about the lack of support available from the school in the inclusion of students. For instance, all the teachers talked about lack of support with the mobility of Ahmed. Teachers reported that because Ahmed's wheelchair was not on level with his desk in the class, he had to be shifted to an ordinary chair to sit by his desk and shifted back to his wheelchair whenever he was taken outside the class. Therefore, teachers reported this procedure as difficult and time consuming without any support being arranged. Manik shared one such instance.

“My class starts at 1.40pm but I could not start the class until 2.05pm. When I went to the class Ahmed was just back with his class teacher from PE so he had to be shifted to the class chair. As I and the class teacher were not able to do the shifting ourselves, I had to go up and down the stairs looking for the guard who normally helps with this. To get everything settled, it took about 25 minutes.” (Interview, Manik)

The researcher's observation in the field revealed consistent findings.

It was time for the PE period. Mary told the class to get ready for the PE period while she is gone for looking for someone to help shift Ahmed. After six minutes the teacher was back with a man (school guard). He came and unfolded the wheel chair that was by the side of the class. All the boys gathered around Ahmed and helped the man shifting Ahmed. Some students were holding the wheel chair while others held his legs and hands. Once Ahmed was shifted one of the boys moved his wheel chair to the school compound for PE. This process took about twelve minutes.  
(Field notes)

It is worth to note that the same procedure was followed when the class came back from PE but with more time and difficulty as the school guard was reluctant to shift Ahmed without the help from another adult.

Manik and Amira discussed other issues with Ahmed sitting in a plastic chair in the class. These were in relation to his rights and safety. According to Manik, when Ahmed sat on a plastic chair he was not able to move in the class like the others did. He further explained this with an example.

“When a test is given the class has to be arranged in rows for which all the students move but Ahmed can’t. I feel that when everyone moves, I should help him move so that he sits the same as others but I can’t, because I know it is not safe to move his plastic chair with him.”  
(Interview, Manik)

A similar situation was observed by the researcher.

The teacher announced that they are going to do the Maths test paper. Everyone moved their chairs to form rows. Ahmed stayed in the same position ending up facing the opposite direction. (Field notes)

Amira believed that it was not safe to leave Ahmed alone in the class. Therefore, she reported that she found it difficult to leave him alone when he could not move on his own. She also added that she feared that anything might happen at any time.

For the above reasons both Manik and Amira reported their attempts to find a chair that he could use both for sitting in class and moving about.

“I have even asked my brother who travels to Bangkok to look for a suitable chair for Ahmed.” (Interview, Amira)

“I discussed with the class teacher about finding a chair with wheels for Ahmed to sit in the class. I talked about this with the deputy principal too.” (Interview, Manik)

In addition, teachers talked about the lack of support and collaboration between the SEN and the general staff. Mary reported that students such as Ali were transferred from the SEN unit without necessary information or documents to refer. Similarly, Reena noted that when students with SEN were included without

any information and support, she assumes that they have to be treated the same in terms of content and assessments. She also noted that when SEN teachers' work only in the morning session, afternoon session teachers do not meet them to ask for any suggestions. Additionally, commenting on the lack of support, Haleem noted that the school provided professional development related to teaching students with SEN to SEN teachers only.

“Professional development on the area of SEN is only held for SEN teachers. They are sent to abroad too but they do not help us in anyway. They are a different group.” (Interview, Haleem)

Consistently, Hawwa reported that general teachers and classes were not paid attention in relation to teaching students with SEN.

“We do not get much support. Normal teachers are not given opportunities but SEN teachers are. They are all doing a course on special education too. Facilities are also in the SEN classes but not much in the general classes.” (Interview, Hawwa)

#### **4.4.3.3 Lack of preparedness**

Teachers also reported their lack of preparedness in teaching students with SEN. Some teachers noted that the initial teacher training did not prepare them at all for inclusive education.

“I can't remember anything from my teacher training that was about students with SEN but we always talked that there will be students of different levels in each class and to base the classroom tasks to these different levels. But I don't believe this is anything to do with teaching students with SEN. During my training I have never had any information about dealing students with SEN in a different way.” (Interview, Manik)

“I did not learn about special education in my teacher training in faculty of education. Therefore, I find it difficult to deal with these students.” (Interview, Amira)

Therefore, these teachers noted that they had difficulty in identifying students' needs. Elaborating on this, Manik reported that for instance, he always thought that Ali was different but was not able to understand his behaviour without knowledge about SEN. He also believed that it was important to understand a student's behaviour in order to respond to them appropriately.

## **4.5 Teaching and learning in the class**

### **4.5.1 Curriculum, planning and assessment**

#### **4.5.1.1 Curriculum**

Teachers reported that all students from the general classes followed the same curriculum. Manik and Mary noted that this was challenging because it was hard for students with SEN to reach the standards.



“These students (students with SEN) do not reach the class standard and they cannot learn what is taught at class level.” (Interview, Manik)

“It is very difficult to bring Ahmed to the class standard but now we do not have to.” (Interview, Mary)

Mary further explained that students with medical certificates indicating a condition that affected their learning did not necessarily have to meet class standards. This is indirectly communicated in the documents from ministry and school.

According to the Education Ministry circular no 6/2009,

It is a teacher's responsibility to make sure that every child is literate in English, Dhivehi and Mathematics by the end of grade one, unless they have medical certificates indicating a reason that affects their learning.

Based on this circular, the school record book states:

Supervisors should make sure that no illiterate child is left behind by the end of the year unless they have a medical condition (p. 9).

As a consequence, teachers tend to use the medical certificates as a means to explain their educational failure. This is illustrated in the quote below:

“I had to get the medical certificates from his parent because I needed it show why Ali is unable to learn and be literate in English”. (Interview, Mary)

In addition, Mary talked about her supervisor asking her to discuss with Ali’s mother to transfer him to grade one. According to her this was done because Ali did not meet the standards in the grade.

#### **4.5.1.2 Planning**

All the teachers reported doing the same planning for all the students. Some of the teachers explained the main reasons why different work was not planned as typified by the quotes that follow.

“The senior management sometimes does not emphasize much, there is only one teacher, the parent might not be happy to see different work, and it might create problems because everyone does the same test.”(Interview, Mary)

“There is no policy in the school that different work should be given to these students.” (Interview, Hawwa)

In addition, Hawwa commented that even the students did not like it when they were given different work. For instance, she noted that Ali always refused to do any simple work set for him and preferred to do the same work that the others in

the class were doing. In her opinion students cannot be forced to do work that they do not want.

It was also found that all teachers followed the same format to write their plans which was given printed and formatted as a book. This format requires teachers to write a starter, objectives, activities and a plenary. Each lesson plan format is fit to a page as shown below.

Lesson Notes - 2011	
<b>LESSON PLAN</b>	
<b>SUBJECT:</b>	
<b>CLASS/ CLASSES:</b>	
Week:	
Date:	
Period:	
Topic:	
<b>STARTER:</b>	
<b>OBJECTIVES:</b>	
<b>DEVELOPMENT / ACTIVITIES:</b>	
<b>PLENARY:</b> _____	
<b>Name of Teacher:</b>	

Figure 2: lesson plan format

This may further limit the flexibility of writing lesson plans in different ways. When teachers had the same plan for everyone, Ali was unable to follow or complete the tasks assigned in class for which teachers expected help to be provided from other students in the class or at home. Ali's mother, Fathima commented that Ali was given the same work which most of the time he could not do. Fathima and Ali seemed to seek help from the tuition teachers to get the class work completed.

“Ali is given the same work. He is not able to do subjects in English but he does work given in Dhivehi and Islam on his own. He finds it difficult to do the work on his own and we do not know English. So he is taken to a tuition class and he completes what is given in school in the tuition class.” (Interview, Fathima)

“I go to tuition to finish the work. I do all my work with the tuition teacher.” (Interview, Ali)

Fathima also noted that having to do things he did not know, Ali was losing interest in studies and finding it harder to cope as he moved to upper grades.

“He knows little English now but he does not put much effort in his studies. This could be because he does not like doing what he does not know. Also as he moves up to higher grades the lessons are becoming more difficult for him to cope with. This is also because his brain is not functioning like a normal student.” (Interview, Fathima)

Similarly, Ahmed's sister Aishath reported that most of the days when Ahmed returned from school, she found nothing done in his books. She also added that her brother did not like doing his work at home because he found the work too hard. She further noted that although Ahmed used to love going to school, now he refused to go to school each day.

“Every night before going to bed, Ahmed would say that he would not go to school the next day. In the morning he refuses to wake up and repeat that he does not want to go to school.” (Interview, Aishath)

#### **4.5.1.3 Assessment**

Teachers from this study pointed out that most of the assessments take the form of a written test paper that contains three levels of questions to cater for the low, average and high ability students. However, they pointed out that no modification is brought to any test paper to cater for students with SEN in their classes. Teachers also pointed that when students are only assessed through written tests, students with special needs, especially those who have reading and writing difficulties are at a disadvantage. Therefore, teachers noted that most of the times, these students return the paper either blank or with scribbles or some sections completed, for which they hardly scored any marks.

“Ali is not able to do anything in the test papers. He does not do questions he has to write. He gets the answer right only from multiple

choice questions where he has to tick. This is also mainly by chance but he can do Dhivehi because he can read and write Dhivehi.” (Interview, Mary)

Consistently, it was observed that when Ali was given the same test paper with instructions in English, he just completed it without understanding or following the instructions.

The teacher distributed the test papers and students started doing it. It was the same paper for everyone. It was a fraction unit test with instructions in English. Ali who had difficulty in reading English was not given any help with the instructions. In addition, his difficulty with writing was not addressed as he was given the same amount of time as others. When Ali got the test paper, he flipped the pages and started working on it. He did not follow the instruction but tried to complete the paper by filling all the blanks and squares with numbers and colouring all the diagrams (field notes).

It was also observed that individual teachers had little or no flexibility with the time of assessment and its content. All the assessments in the form of test papers are prepared in relation to curriculum goals by the subject coordinating teacher and tests are conducted at the same time across the same grade. It was also clear that students were mainly assessed for summative purposes such as reporting and

grading rather than formative purposes such as to find out the next step for the student's learning. Mary noted:

“Although we do continuous assessment, after a test has been given, none of the teacher checks the areas students did not score well and why they could not score. We do not do this at all.” (Interview, Mary)

Mary however noted that in rare circumstances when the majority of students scored low marks in a test, students were re-tested.

## **4.6 Teaching strategies**

The observations in the class revealed that teaching was dominated by the traditional methods of education. Teachers often used direct instructions using the chalk and board while students learned through passive listening and observing. For instance, Reena came into the class and started by explaining how to divide fractions through the use of an algorithm on the board. When the majority of the students could not follow, she repeated the same procedure with a different sum. She then asked a student to work a sum on the board while questioning other students. This was followed by getting students to do a set of sums in the textbook. In the second lesson, Haleem started his lesson by writing some notes on the board for the students to copy to the book. In the meantime, he sat at the back of the class and called individual students to recite certain surah by heart.

Next, he read some verses and the whole class chanted. Some variation was brought by getting a few students to recite while others recited after.

In contrast, Manik's lesson was more student-centred and interactive. He began the lesson by asking the whole class, how they were. He then pointed out to the empty chairs and asked about those students. Meanwhile, he called Ahmed by his name and welcomed him back to class asking how he had been. He started the lesson by recalling the previous day's lesson through whole class questioning. After that he took some picture cards to introduce the lesson. This was followed by an open discussion about the pictures. Later individual students were asked to make sentences using the pictures on the cards. Most of the students were found to be actively participating in the lesson and a lot of the students contributed to the discussions.

#### **4.7 Support for students**

Some teachers, students as well as parents stressed the different types of support provided to the students. Both Ahmed and Ali reported that students were very good and helpful to them. As an example Ahmed noted:

“Students help with borrowing and returning the library books. I tell them to bring a particular book and if the book is not available they would try to find that book during the next library period.” (Interview, Ahmed)



Likewise, Ali reported that his classmates helped him with his class work.

Among parents, Aisha talked about the different kinds of support from the school to Ahmed. Among them, she noted how grateful she was to the school for providing a class downstairs for Ahmed, since he started using the wheelchair.

Similarly, Fathima noted that teachers and students from Ali's class were very good to him. She explained this by stating:

“I am happy about this school because he has not been discriminated and teachers accept what he can do without getting frustrated.” (Interview, Fathima)

“Ali says that his classmates help him with his work. He has many friends too. He shows me them by saying he is a classmate, he is a friend and the like. He even remembers them by their names.” (Interview, Fathima)

Unlike the other parents, Aminath highlighted the daily communication of the class teacher as the best support. According to Aminath, the class teacher met with her every day after school and communicated about Moosa's behaviour. Noting that these communications had made a huge difference in Moosa's behaviour, Aminath stated:

“He has started doing his work and sleeping on time. He also goes to prayers regularly. Now he loves coming to school and gets ready without being told.” (Interview, Aminath)

Aminath noted what happened in the previous school in comparison to what was happening in the current school.

“I was not aware of what went in his class because teachers did not talk to me about what happened in classes. Although I went to fetch him every day, I hardly met the teachers because the classes were upstairs and students came down on their own.” (Interview, Aminath)

Therefore, Aminath stressed the importance of a good relationship between the teachers and parents.

Some teachers also talked about how they supported the students. For instance, Manik noted that he tried to give Ahmed tasks at his level.

“He can’t work at others level so I give him tasks he can do. For instance, the other day, I gave the class to list what they liked about a poem in groups. After that I asked the class to write sentences but I knew Ahmed can’t so I told to list down what they discussed as a group.” (Interview, Manik)

Manik also commented that he always checked how much students had learned by asking questions during the lesson and at the end of the lesson. He also added that:

“Instead of giving a lecture using the chalk and board, I always try to connect students’ ideas to what I am teaching and get them to participate in my lesson.” (Interview, Manik)

He also talked about changing his teaching based on students’ needs in order to support students’ learning. As an example he noted:

“Sometimes when I ask the students to write stories, they say, let’s not write today, but discuss what could be included in the beginning, body and ending. So I agree because I understand that some children might find it difficult to finish a story on the spot and may need time to think.” (Interview, Manik)

Likewise, Hawwa discussed how she supported Ahmed.

“Although other students do not like using the class computer because of its small screen, I sometimes use it as Ahmed cannot climb upstairs.” (Interview, Hawwa)

“I get his library books changed. I choose books that would fit his level.” (Interview, Hawwa)

In addition, it was observed that for more convenient entry and exit, Ahmed was kept on the chair that was closest to the door.

#### **4.8 Exclusion within inclusion**

Although these students were included, there was evidence of exclusion that was going on, alongside the efforts to include them. For instance, Ahmed was excluded from many learning opportunities and some parts of the curriculum, as he was denied access to important school facilities such as the school library, computer labs, AV room and Physical Education (PE) hall. As a result Ahmed stayed back all alone in the class while his classmates went to the library, music, AV room and the PE hall.

“When others go to the library I read in the class. Before, I go to Music but not now. During the music period I stay, some PE periods also I stay.”  
(Interview, Ahmed)

Additionally, despite Ahmed’s keen interest in music, Aishath noted that he was not taken to the music classes. Mary’s explanation for this was the difficulty in the transferring of Ahmed from one chair to the other.

Ali also experienced instances of exclusion. One such incident was observed in a PE period. After stretching, all the girls started playing net ball while the boys got

occupied with football. Ali just walked in the compound saying that he did not like any of the games. However, later in the interview with Ali's mom, it was clear why he did not like to play netball or football.

“Ali has difficulty with hand and leg movement. He finds it difficult to write and is not able to button his shirt on his own. He does not like playing too because he has difficulty in running.” (Interview, Fathima)

Unlike the others, Moosa experienced exclusion as a punishment for his behaviour. According to Moosa, he sat separately in the class because students from his group did not want him to be in their group. The reason for this was his inability to behave the way others expected him to. Moosa noted that his teachers, parents and other students from his group expected him to be quiet and behave well but sometimes he forgot and tended to repeat his behaviour. Data from Moosa's teachers revealed consistent findings. All his teachers reported that he disturbed the class by making noises and using words to make others laugh. The researcher's observation revealed consistent findings.

During the class discussions Moosa responded to questions with irrelevant answers purposely at times. For example, when the teacher asked, which parts of Mecca, he replied with different parts in Male' for which everyone started laughing. He also kept on rocking his chair. At the end of the lesson, he asked the teacher an age inappropriate question for which the

teacher replied that is a different lesson. Again Moosa repeated the same question when the teacher was leaving the class (field notes).

Teachers also noted that he once had a fight with a student from his group. On the other hand, Moosa reported that students from the group teased him by calling nicknames. He also added that students tried not to involve him in group work by avoiding his contributions. Moosa and his teachers seemed to be happier with Moosa sitting separately. For instance, Haleem commented that it was easier now because other students could not complain about Moosa and he could not disturb others. According to Moosa:

“I do not mind being separated from my group because then they will not have any complains about me.” (Interview, Moosa)

Being separated was typical for Moosa because he had experienced more exclusions as punishments for his behaviour, in his previous school. These included sending him home during school hours, suspending, having to spend hours in the supervisor’s room or outside the classroom.

## **4.9 Suggestions**

Based on their experience some participants were able to give suggestions to better enhance inclusive education in the school and remove barriers that challenged inclusive education in the school.

One of the suggestions related to the physical structure of the school. According to the teachers, an elevator is important.

“A lift is very important. Otherwise, a student in a wheel chair will not have access to important facilities such as the AV room and library”  
(Interview, Manik)

Hawwa also shared a similar view. According to her, in order to provide access to all school facilities to students like Ahmed, an elevator needed to be in the school.

The other suggestion related to increasing awareness and knowledge about inclusion among all the staff and related personnel from the ministry. Some teachers stressed the importance of knowledge about SEN. Therefore, they suggested teachers to be trained with background knowledge of SEN. According to Manik, this way,

“Teachers will have fewer problems in accepting and understanding the behaviour of students with SEN.” (Interview, Manik)

Additionally, Haleem pointed out the importance sharing information about students with SEN, suggesting collaboration between SEN and general staff. He also added planning separately for students with SEN and professional development for the teachers on teaching students with SEN as vital.

#### **4.10 Summary**

This section presented a snapshot of one class describing how inclusive education looked in one classroom during the school's early stage of developing inclusive education. It was clear that the school culture and teachers' knowledge and experiences had shaped how they conceptualized and responded to SEN and inclusive education. With special education going on separately, in classes, especially for SEN students, teachers did not realize that a SEN student could be in a general class. Teachers understood SEN as deficits in students that affected their ability to learn. Therefore, students with mental or sensory impairments, in particular those with obvious features, were perceived as only students with SEN. While some teachers believed that all students should be educated in general classes, others favoured a separate, special class for students with mental impairments. Teachers noted that teaching SEN students in general classes was challenging for many reasons, such as the school structure, lack of time, support, and preparedness.



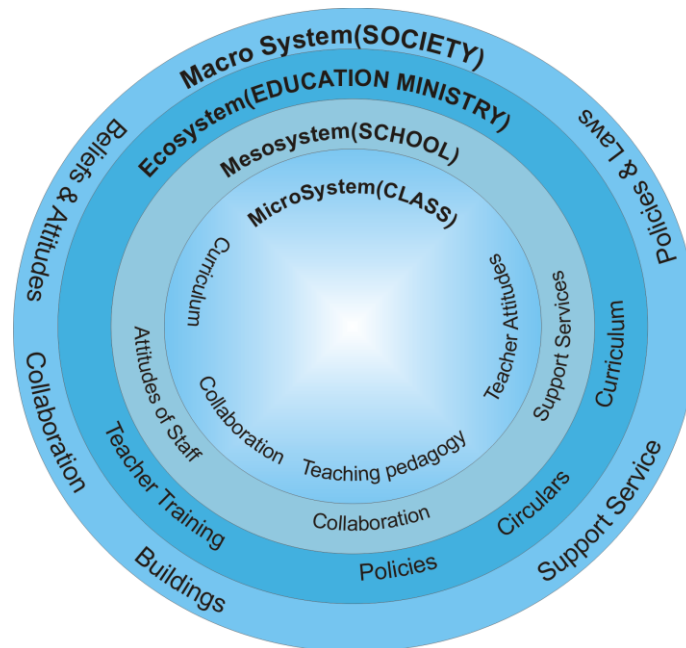
Teaching and learning in the class was dominated by traditional methods of education. Teachers tried to meet the needs of all the students through the same curriculum, planning and assessment. It was also observed that some students experienced educational exclusion in different forms. These resulted from denied access to: important school facilities; teacher time; an appropriate curriculum and friendship groups. For successful inclusion, an elevator in the school, increased attention to develop teachers' knowledge about SEN and inclusive education, and collaboration between the SEN and general staff were recommended by the teachers.

## **Chapter Five: Discussion**

### **5.1 Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to look at, explore, document and understand the development of inclusive education in one urban school in the Maldives, taking into note the steps taken to move the school towards inclusion, experiences of some stakeholders involved in the process and the factors that influenced inclusive education in the school.

The findings of this study and the review of literature demonstrate the complexity of developing inclusive education as there are multiple factors from connected systems impacting the process of change. Therefore, based on Bronfenbrenner's ecological framework presented in the literature review, Figure 3 presents the multiple factors at different system levels that influenced the development of inclusive education.



*Figure 3: The ecological framework showing the factors and levels that influenced inclusive education in the school*

Using the above framework as an organizer for the discussion, this chapter initially discusses the main findings of the study in relation to the literature review. Next, factors from the different system levels, and how they influence one another are discussed. Subsequently, the limitations encountered in this study are discussed followed by recommendations for future research. Finally, the implications of the research are presented.

## **5.2 Summary of the main findings**

### **5.2.1 School (Mesosystem)**

From the study, it is clear that the development of inclusive education in Hilaalee School is still at an early stage of implementation. Hilaalee School began the movement towards inclusion by integrating students from the SEN classes to the general classes for subjects they were good at. This movement was initiated by the leadership of a school leader rather than driven by local policies. This is similar to findings by Yee (2005), who reported that change in a Hong Kong primary school that was moving towards inclusion was brought mainly by the leadership of some teachers rather than by policy. This also resonates with the argument made by Mitchell (2008) and Forlin and Lian (2008) that leadership is a key factor in moving schools towards inclusion.

The findings also revealed that the integrated students had a variety of experiences in the regular classes in which they were integrated. These were related to the facilitators and barriers to inclusive education. The factors that contributed to a positive experience were the positive attitude of teachers, teachers' acceptance of students with SEN, the support the teachers provided to those integrated students by adapting work according to their interest and level, and the support of other students in the class. These factors have been discussed by researchers as facilitators of inclusive education (Foreman, 2008; Forlin & Lian, 2008; Garner,

2009; Jones, 2011; McConkey & Bradley, 2010; Michailakis & Reich, 2009; Munir, 2010; Ring & Travers, 2005; UNESCO, 2003)

In contrast to these positive experiences, the negative experiences were related to negative attitudes of teachers, other students and parents towards disability, lack of adaptations to the curriculum and, teachers treating the integrated student as a visitor and not paying the same attention that they paid to the other students in the class. Similar findings were observed in some schools in India by Singal (2008) who reported that teachers from his study only took partial responsibility of students who were mainstreamed from the SEN units into their classrooms, brought limited adaptations to the teaching practices and held the belief that SEN students can be better taught by the SEN teachers.

Similar to the participants in the study by Yee (2005), the school leaders and teachers who were involved in the trial inclusion program in the Hilaalee School learned through practice. Some of the important lessons that they learned were the need to: collaborate between the SEN teachers and general teachers; increase knowledge and awareness about SEN among the school community; and develop support systems and policies. Following this, steps have been taken to address these through awareness sessions, writing an inclusion policy and developing teachers' knowledge through opportunities for professional development. These steps that were taken in Hilaalee School were suggested by parents and students

with disabilities in the study by Pivik et al.(2002), as areas that required improvement in schools. Their suggestions included changes to the physical environment, addressing negative attitudes through disability awareness sessions, increasing teacher's knowledge about inclusion and developing inclusive policies.

Although some steps were taken to move the school towards inclusion, the focus was on integration and increasing educational and social opportunities for students with SEN, especially those from the SEN classes. Similar to a study in Greece (Strogilos, 2011), inclusion was planned in Hilaalee School as something 'extra' that was provided to students with SEN. From this observation, many things were made clear. Firstly, as Mitchell (2010) mentions, a very basic and traditional interpretation of inclusion is evident. According to Mitchell, at the most basic level, inclusion is understood as educating learners with SEN in regular education settings, which are currently viewed as a traditional interpretation of inclusion. This approach to inclusion in Hilaalee School is better described as integration, after considering the critical differences discussed between inclusion and integration by Garner (2009), and by Marschark, Young and Lukomski (2002).

Additionally, this approach to inclusion suggests that the school has adopted a medical model of disability instead of a social or organizational. This finding is consistent with the findings by Skidmore (2002) and by Carrington (1999) that cultural interpretation of disability and school failure strongly affects

opportunities for inclusion and how educators interact with students. From the present study, it is clear that attention was on student's labels or difficulties rather than on factors such as the competence of teachers, the curriculum and school structure, all of which have the potential to create learning difficulties in students (Dyson, Millward & Robin, 1999; Jones, 2004; Michailakis & Reich, 2009).

The present study also revealed that, despite their efforts, that development of inclusive efforts had yet to succeed because this development lacked some of the factors essential to successful inclusion described by Ainscow (2005) and by Mitchell (2010). These factors include: collaboration between the SEN and general staff; positive attitudes towards disability; knowledge and understanding about inclusion; support systems; an inclusive school environment that is physically accessible to all learners including those with physical disabilities; a curriculum that allows flexibility and caters for all learners; and a school culture where all learners are valued and respected equally. What the researcher observed in Hilaalee School is a far cry from the observations made in the study conducted by Avramidis, Bayliss and Burden (2002) in a school in England. They observed modifications being brought to the environment of the school to accommodate students with physical disabilities, support systems being established to ensure the needs of students with SEN were met, and additional support being provided to all the students in the general classes rather than separate settings.

### **5.2.2 Class (Microsystem)**

Findings from the class in the present study illustrated a variety of views and practices, some of which supported inclusive education while others acted as a barrier. Some teachers like Manik, felt that inclusion is a basic right and hence, favoured inclusion while identifying the importance of support services and collaboration between the SEN and general teachers for successful inclusion. This is also discussed in previous research studies exploring factors necessary for successful inclusion (Ainscow, 2005; Carrington & Elkins, 2002; McConkey & Bradley, 2010; Mitchell, 2010; UNESCO, 2003). On the other hand, some of the teachers from the studied class had negative attitudes towards students with SEN as they believed these students would be better educated in separate classes. Similar beliefs of teachers were observed in previous studies (Angelides, 2004; Singal, 2008; Strogilos, 2011).

Similarly, both teacher-centered and student-centered approaches to teaching were observed. Research favours student-centered approaches over teacher-centered approaches for inclusive classrooms (Stakes & Hornby, 2000). Similar to Manik, a teacher in the present study, teachers from a Swedish inclusive classroom used discussions and adapted work to cater for the diverse needs of students in the class (Niholm & Alm, 2010).



The findings from the class in the present study also revealed the high emphasis given to covering the content rather than meeting the needs of students. This was because teachers had to follow the same undifferentiated curriculum and text book materials for everyone and cover the content on time. This limited the teachers' flexibility and time for differentiation. Similar findings were reported in the study by Strogilos (2011) who argued that when teachers were expected to follow the same undifferentiated curriculum for all the students, it hindered the teachers' thinking and provided them with an excuse not to differentiate. Similar to the teachers in the study done by Yee (2005), some teachers from this study expected extra remedial teaching at home to help students with SEN to keep up with the class work.

As similarly observed in studies done in Cyprus (Angelides, 2004), Bangladesh (Munir, 2010), Nigeria (Anumonye as cited in Eleweke & Rodda, 2002), India (Singal, 2008), students with SEN in the class in the present study did not receive appropriate support, hence did not meaningfully participate in the culture and curricular of the school. This lack of support raises issues of safety, especially in the case of Ahmed, who has muscular dystrophy and was sitting in a chair that was not suitable for children with muscular dystrophy. According to Thorburn (1997), students with muscular dystrophy require both physical and emotional support in maintaining relationships with peers, attendance at school and

maintaining motivation. This lack of support could be the reason for Ahmed's unwillingness to attend school.

The teachers from the studied class reported not being prepared to teach students with SEN. This is consistent with findings reported in other studies (Angelides, 2004; Singal, 2008; Munir, 2010; Strogilos, 2011).

### **5.2.3 Education ministry (Exosystem)**

One of the recent developments towards inclusion from the ministry was the development of a framework for use in monitoring and evaluating schools, in which 'inclusivity' was one of the indicators. According to the framework all schools "should have a policy on inclusivity to ensure that all children are sought out, enrolled and placed in a learning environment that best meets the specific needs of male and female members of the school community without bias and discrimination" (Ministry of Education, 2010a, p. 3). This statement is not very clear and does not support full inclusion. However, one of the government's responses to education of students with SEN is through developing separate provisions within regular schools. This practice is also observed in Sri Lanka by UNESCO (2003) who reported that one common feature of inclusive practice in the country was the development of special education units within regular schools. However, this approach to inclusion has been criticized by researchers such as Carrington and Elkins (2002), Strogilos (2011) Clark, Dyson, Millward and

Robson (1999). According to Carrington and Elkins, having separate classes convey the message that students with SEN have limited capabilities and work provided in general classes are not appropriate for them. Similarly, Strogilos (2011) argued separate provisions “promote a strong cultural individualistic response to disability and a socially unjust educational system” (p. 2). Clark et al. (1999) believe that education systems favour separate provisions for students with SEN to ensure the smooth running of the existing routines in the general education system, rather than responding to students' needs.

This could be true in the case of Maldives where the education system is highly centralized as in Greece (Strogilos, 2011). The Education Ministry in the Maldives controls the physical and academic structure of the school, curriculum, text books and implements all educational policies. As a policy, all schools have to follow the national syllabus and students from the regular classes are expected to work on the same undifferentiated curriculum and materials (textbooks) regardless of ability. Yet, general teachers are not accountable for bringing students with a diagnosed SEN to the national standards as discussed in section 5.5.1. These discussions clearly suggest that principles that guide the education policies are dominated by the medical discourse of disability.

#### **5.2.4 Society (Macrosystem)**

At society (macrosystem) level factors such as policies, knowledge traditions, values and attitudes of a society, are considered as playing important roles in implementing inclusive education. The aim of the factors at these levels is to bring about changes so that differences become positively valued, education systems become morally committed to the integration of all students into a single education system, schools become welcoming environments, teachers become committed to working with all children, and curricula becoming freed of 'disablist' (Flem, Moen, & Gudmundsdottir, 2004). From the study by Human Rights Commission (2010), it is clear that the majority of students with disabilities in the Maldives do not attend school and those who attend are faced with many barriers to learning and participation. The main reasons for this according to the study are negative attitudes towards disability among the society, lack of knowledge about disability among government staff, lack of support systems for people with disabilities, lack of trained personnel to support persons with disabilities, and lack of policies that promote inclusion. These barriers to inclusive education have also been observed in other developing countries (Eleweke & Rodda, 2010; Mitchell, 2008).

### **5.3 Making the connections**

The factors discussed at different systems have impacted and were impacted by one another. For instance, factors from the societal and ministry level have influenced inclusive education in the school. However, as argued by Ainscow (2005), some of the influences provided encouragement while others acted as a barrier. For instance, the government's initiative to introduce the framework for use in monitoring and evaluating schools facilitated inclusion in the school to some extent. According to Sama, the training programme held for school leaders on inclusion provided her with some knowledge and exposure to inclusive education in practice and motivated her to take steps to make the school more inclusive. Similarly, with the introduction of the Diploma course on special education in Maldives National University, it provided the SEN teachers with an opportunity for professional development. Sama talked about sharing the new learning from the course with the SEN teachers who do not attend it.

On the other hand, the negative attitude of some of the teachers acted as a barrier in accepting students with SEN and planning activities that foster inclusion in the school. The reason for these negative attitudes can be resulting from the historical, social and cultural context of special education and the limited training teachers had received in teaching students with SEN (Angelides, 2007). Similar findings were noted by the study Human Rights Commission (2010).

Similarly, inclusion in the school was hindered by the lack of professionals and paraprofessional to work with integrated students. This is due to a lack of trained personnel to support persons with disabilities, lack of knowledge about disability among the government staff and lack of support systems for people with disabilities in the Maldives (Human Rights Commission, 2010).

Additionally, the separate provision established by the government for students with SEN made the school culture less inclusive. It promoted separation and exclusion of some students and resulted in the school providing two distinct education systems. According to Thomas, Walker and Webb (1998) the physical environment of a school reflects the attitude taken to inclusive education.

Furthermore, the school's physical and academic structure affected the level of inclusion. For instance, when the school buildings and facilities were not made in a way that is suitable for students with physical disabilities, teachers found it difficult to provide the student with a physical disability with equal educational opportunities. Similarly, having to follow an undifferentiated curriculum and rigid timetables limited the time for teachers to attend to the needs of individual students. Clark, Dyson, Millward and Robson (1999) argued that when organizations demand teachers to work individually on routines that allow them little flexibility, they are less likely to develop the flexible problem-solving

strategies that enable them to respond to the diverse needs of students in their class.

Likewise, the ministry's circular that required teachers to be responsible in making sure all students except those with medical conditions become literate made teachers unaccountable for students with SEN in their classes thus affecting the level inclusion of students with SEN. The classroom teachers used the medical certificates as a way to explain their educational failure and excluded them from extra remedial support and avoided their marks while calculating the class average. This clearly indicated that at all levels (macrosystem, exosystem, mesosystem and microsystem), disability is seen as deficits in students, differences are not valued and expectations for students with SEN are very low.

“A classroom reflects, but is not limited to, features of the school culture” (Mitchell, 2008, p.83). This statement is relevant for this study. It was clear that the school culture had influenced how teachers conceptualized and responded to SEN and inclusive education. With special education going on separately, in classes labelled as SEN classes, teachers did not realize that a SEN student could be in a general class. In addition, when the school lacked important factors for successful inclusion such as collaboration between the SEN teachers and support systems, teachers from the general class did not have any kind of support from either SEN teachers or paraprofessionals in meeting the needs of students with

SEN in their classes. This resulted in students with SEN being placed in the general class without adequate support for them or their teachers.

This study portrayed the various challenges and complexities that schools face when attempting to move towards inclusion. Taken together, the analysis shows that although the school is moving towards inclusive education, the developmental process has been very challenging for the school. This is because there are numerous barriers to inclusion at society, education ministry, school and class level. This confirms the findings by Mitchell (2008) and Elewake and Roadda (2002) and McConkey and Bradley (2010), who pointed out that developing inclusive education is more challenging and daunting in developing and low-income countries.

#### **5.4 Limitations of the study**

This study was limited to one urban school and in particular one class. This study was also limited to a school with a SEN unit. Diverse populations and settings could result in the identification of other issues.

The study had to be conducted during the month of Ramadan when the school was having short sessions. Therefore, each period lasted for twenty five minutes instead of thirty five minutes. This could have affected teachers' normal practice of teaching and the use of teaching approaches. Therefore, the observations made



by the researcher may not fully represent their general practice. Observing the teachers in the regular schedule would have enhanced the reliability of the findings.

Students' responses to interview questions were limited to a few words even when prompted by the researcher. Using other ways of data collection with them could have made them express their thoughts more in detail.

## **5.5 Recommendations for future research**

This study took place in Hilaalee school while staff in the school were planning to move it further towards inclusion by mainstreaming all students from the SEN unit for as many subjects they were prepared for, implementing a school policy on inclusion, increasing teachers' awareness on inclusion and recruiting paraprofessionals to work in general classes. These have the potential in making the school and classrooms more inclusive. Therefore, it would be useful to find out how the general teachers, paraprofessionals and the SEN teachers collaborate, how support is organized, what practices are adopted by teachers to address the increased student diversity in the class and what practices influence the quality of inclusion. This research could be done involving more school leaders, other grades and other teachers of the school.

As inclusive education is at the initial stage of implementation in the Maldives, it would be useful to carry out similar studies in other school settings such as schools without SEN units, rural schools, private schools and preschools. As inclusion in schools is affected by beliefs held by government staff and the national policies, it would be useful to do research on the development and implementation of policy and the influences between those policies and practice.

# **Chapter Six: Implications and Conclusion**

## **6.1 Introduction**

This study shows that while some factors necessary for successful implementation of inclusive education are present at Hilaalee School, there are also many other factors lacking in the school. It is also clear that without the commitment and support from the broader society and the education system, inclusion in the school would barely expand. Hence, this study has implications on four levels: school, class, education ministry and society.

## **6.2 School and classroom**

Important facilitators for creating an inclusive school culture are values and attitudes held by staff, leadership, development of support networks, usage of student-centered pedagogy and collaboration between regular class teachers and a range of others including specialist teachers, teaching assistants, therapists and parents (Mitchell, 2010). This study revealed incidents that suggested negative attitudes and values held by staff. For instance, staff had less expectation for students with SEN and disabilities were understood as deficits in students which

according to Jones (2011) does not portray a positive attitude and only represents the medical model.

Support is another vital factor for successful inclusion. Mitchell (2008) believes that successful inclusion requires support for an educator at class level in putting in place a whole suite of provisions, including adapted curriculum, adapted teaching methods, modified assessment techniques, and accessibility arrangements. Similarly, Forlin and Lian (2008) argue that the development of suitable support models is a significant contributing factor to the successful teaching of students with disabilities. Therefore, it is important to develop support systems within the school. As suggested by McConkey and Bradley (2010), this support could take the form of: advice from specialists who could spend time in advising and supporting teachers in making appropriate assessments of students' needs and means to support them; provide teachers with extra training; and recruit volunteers from families and the community to support the teachers.

It is also important for the SEN teachers and general teachers to collaborate with each other because no individual teacher can be successful with all the children (Angelides, 2004). The benefits of collaboration include sharing responsibilities for students and teaching tasks, designing more creative lessons and solutions, developing better understanding of student needs, providing greater individualization, increasing opportunities for successful student participation, and

engendering a greater sense of belonging for both students and teachers (Rainforth & England, 1997). Therefore, it is important to extend the SEN teachers' responsibility from only support to students to collaborating with teachers in problem solving, sharing accountability and practice, and co-teaching in general classes.

In addition, the present study observed the need for teachers to differentiate curriculum. Differentiation of the curriculum is a baseline strategy for dealing with students with SEN and this is necessary in order to allow and increase participation by all learners (Garner, 2009). It is important that teachers differentiate the curriculum based on individual needs through modification of the content, the level of difficulty, intended goals and the method of instruction (Koga & Hall as cited in Foreman, 2004). It is also vital for teachers to recognize that students are still achieving when they make progress based on a modified curriculum, though it is different from what is expected at grade level, and note that they are the mediators of learning instead of deliverers of the curriculum (Foreman, 2008).

Furthermore, there is the need for teachers to incorporate student-centred pedagogy rather than teacher-centred approaches. Teacher-centred approaches such as talk and lecture and tasks that require students to work independently are found to be the least successful with students with SEN (Stakes & Hornby, 2000).

For successful inclusion of all students, teachers need to increase the use of multisensory approaches, student-centred learning tasks that are interesting and relevant to the learners, and active learning strategies such as cooperative learning and peer tutoring which are particularly effective for teaching students with SEN (Konstantinos, 2001; Mitchell, 2008; Stakes & Hornby, 2000).

### **6.3 Society and education ministry**

To promote quality in inclusive education, a clearly stated policy that maximizes all the factors that support inclusion is necessary (European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, 2009, p. 21). Therefore, as the national inclusion policy is at drafting stage, it is important to speed up the implementation of the policy. It is also important to revisit the existing policies and circulars that act as barriers to inclusion such as developing SEN units and circular no. 6/2009. Slee and Allan (2001) argue that incorporation of referral units as an accepted part of the education systems promotes educational exclusion. Similarly, Carrington (1999) asserts that when regular teachers are not made accountable for students with SEN in their classrooms, it prevents them from problem solving and developing innovative methods to meet the needs of students. Therefore, the segregated practice of SEN classes could be avoided and SEN teachers could be encouraged to work alongside general teachers in general classrooms, and all teachers could be trained to work in inclusive settings.

In order for teachers to be able to work effectively in inclusive settings, teachers need to have appropriate knowledge and understanding, attitudes, values and skills. Therefore, attention needs to be paid to these elements in the initial teacher education and in-service training sessions of all the teachers (European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, 2009). According to Forlin and Lian (2008) teacher education that focuses on traditional perspectives such as learning content and transfer of knowledge does not prepare teachers sufficiently for inclusive education. Therefore, they stress that teachers should be prepared with a focus on developing both theoretical knowledge and practical knowledge alongside positive values, supportive ideals, high moral principles and strong ethical understandings regarding responsibility for the education of children, regardless of the diversity of their needs. The European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education (2009) suggests that teacher training for inclusion to involve enhancing knowledge and skills in differentiation and meeting diverse learners, and working collaboratively with parents and families. Given that, as Yee (2005) suggests for Hong Kong, it would be beneficial if the Maldives National University and other private teacher training institutions provide a module on “managing diversity” for all initial teacher training programmes.

Curriculum facilitates inclusive education when it is not extensive, demanding or centrally designed. More locally designed curriculum gives teachers greater flexibility in making differentiations to better suit the individual learners

(UNESCO, 2003). Teachers' accounts and the researcher's observations revealed that teachers had limited flexibility in bringing changes to the curriculum content and assessment methods, playing a negative role in the development of inclusion. Therefore, it is important to allow teachers flexibility with curriculum content, assessment, examination and evaluation as well. Foreman (2008) pointed out that it is important for teachers to recognize that students are still achieving when they make progress based on a modified curriculum though it is different from what is expected at grade level. Equally important is teachers need to note that they are the mediators of learning instead of deliverers of the curriculum.

It is also important to design and conduct programs to raise societal awareness to enable people to reform their attitudes towards people with disabilities and take actions to make all the public buildings such as schools accessible for persons with disabilities.



## **6.4 Conclusion**

This case study illustrated the movement towards inclusion in one urban school in the Maldives and discussed the steps taken to develop inclusive education in the school, the experience of different stakeholders involved in the process and the factors that influenced inclusive education in the school. As inclusive education is a new concept in the Maldives, and Hilaalee School is one of the first adopters of inclusion, the concepts and practice of this school might help other schools in the Maldives to facilitate their attempts to making their schools more inclusive. In addition, this research may be a step towards the enrichment of knowledge of inclusive education for other developing countries that are at the initial stage of implementing inclusion.

### **6.4.1 Some final researcher thoughts**

This study was my first attempt towards qualitative research. This provided me with first-hand experience on data collection, analysis and presenting. I found qualitative research interesting as the research process allowed me to gain access to the natural setting, and get to be personally involved in the process of data collection. However, it is noteworthy to mention the challenges I faced.

The data collection and the data analysis demanded knowledge, skills and time. For instance, the data collection phase required me to spend time in the setting, be

a good question-asker, listener, prober and observer. In the analysis stage, a lot of time had to be devoted to transcribing the data, familiarizing myself with the data and making good interpretation of it. As a novice researcher, all these tasks challenged me and took more time than I had expected. This process, however, increased my knowledge and skills to do qualitative research and provided with a few tips for future research.

I thought the effect of gaps in interviews, observations and collection of documents could be addressed by analyzing data as soon as possible, preferably while still in the research setting. I also found that this is especially important if the research setting is different from the location one analyzes the data. For example, when I was analyzing the data after having returned from the research setting, I had additional information that needed confirmation through observations, interviews and documents. However, being out of the country (research field), reaching some participants, specifically those who did not use the online communication facilities was difficult. Continuous analysis could also have made the analysis process less daunting and more effective.

I am keen to continue doing more qualitative research and encouraging my teacher trainees to use qualitative research methods in their classes to better understand and meet the needs of their students.

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# Appendices

## Appendix A: Information letters and consent forms

Telephone in the Maldives: +960.....

Email: [badhoora.naseer@pg.canterbury.ac](mailto:badhoora.naseer@pg.canterbury.ac).

1 July 2011

**Developing inclusive education: How does it look in one primary class in the Maldives?**

### **INFORMATION LETTER FOR THE PRINCIPAL**

Dear sir/madam,

I am a Maldivian Master's student in the School of Educational Studies and Human Development at the University of Canterbury, conducting research under the supervision of Dr Missy Morton and Professor Garry Hornby.

I would like to invite you to participate in my study, exploring the process of educating students with Special Education Needs (SEN) in regular classrooms (inclusive education).

With this research, I intend to explore your experiences, perspectives and feelings relative to inclusive education. I also propose to explore the successes and challenge the school face with inclusive education. Further to this, the study will investigate the knowledge and skills primary teachers believe they need to be effective in their role. I hope the reflections of the process will help to identify barriers to learning and/or successful strategies that promote learning for students with special education needs being educated in general classrooms. Therefore, this study has the potential to identify strengths and gaps in the way in which teachers are currently prepared in the Maldives. Hence the results can be used for initial teacher education. The results may also be important when designing professional development opportunities for in service teachers in primary schools.

As a participant of this study, you will be interviewed once about your role and experience as the head of a school progressing towards inclusive education. The interview session would take place in a mutually agreed upon location and should take no more than 45 minutes. With your permission, the interview will be audio recorded to facilitate collection

of information, and later transcribed for analysis. If you would prefer not to have your responses tape –recorded, you will be given the option of having your responses written exactly in the same words. After the interview has been completed, I will send you a copy of the transcript to give you an opportunity to confirm the accuracy of our conversation and to add or clarify any points that you wish.

Further to this, I would like to see documents such as the inclusive policy and the curriculum of the school for a better understanding of the inclusive education in your school.

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may decline to answer any of the interview questions if you so wish. Further, you may decide to withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences by advising the researcher. If you withdraw, I will do my best to remove any information relating to you, provided this is practically achievable.

I will take particular care to ensure the confidentiality of all data gathered for this study. I will also take care to ensure your anonymity in publications of the findings. Your name will not appear in any thesis or report resulting from this study, however, with your permission anonymous quotations may be used.

All the data will be securely stored in password protected facilities and locked storage at the University of Canterbury for five years following the study. After that time all written information related to this study and your participation in it will be destroyed by shredding. All versions of electronic copies will be deleted and erased from my laptop. There are no known or anticipated risks to you as a participant in this study.

A summary of my research will be made available to you and to your school.

University of Canterbury of Educational Research Human Ethics Committee has reviewed and approved this study.

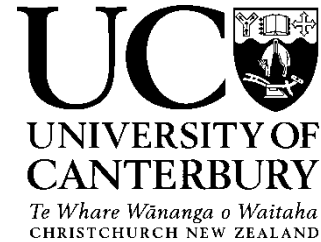
If you have any questions about the study, please do not hesitate to contact me (details above) or my supervisor Dr Missy Morton ([missy.morton@canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:missy.morton@canterbury.ac.nz)).

If you have a complaint about the study, you may contact the Chair, Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, University of Canterbury, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch ([human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz)).

If you agree to participate in this study, please complete the attached consent form and leave it in the envelope provided. The consent form will be picked by me by 15<sup>th</sup> September 2011.

I am looking forward to working with you.

Yours Sincerely,  
Badhoora Naseer (Master's student)



Telephone in the Maldives: +960.....

Email: [badhoora.naseer@pg.canterbury.ac](mailto:badhoora.naseer@pg.canterbury.ac).

1 July 2011

**Developing inclusive education: How does it look in one primary class in the Maldives?**  
**INFORMATION LETTER FOR THE SUPERVISOR IN CHARGE OF STUDENTS**  
**WITH SEN**

Dear

I am a Maldivian Master's student in the School of Educational Studies and Human Development at the University of Canterbury conducting research under the supervision of Dr Missy Morton and Professor Garry Hornby.

I would like to invite you to participate in my study, exploring the process of educating students with Special Education Needs (SEN) in regular classrooms (inclusive education).

With this research, I intend to explore your experiences, perspectives and feelings relative to inclusive education. I also propose to explore the successes and challenge the school face with inclusive education. Further to this, the study will investigate the knowledge and skills primary teachers believe they need to be effective in their role. I hope the reflections of the process will help to identify barriers to learning and/or successful strategies that promote learning for students with special education needs being educated in general classrooms. Therefore, this study has the potential to identify strengths and gaps in the way in which teachers are currently prepared in the Maldives. Hence the results can be used for initial teacher education. The results may also be important when designing professional development opportunities for in service teachers in primary schools.

As a participant of this study, you will be interviewed once about your role and experience as the supervisor in charge of the students with SEN in a school progressing towards inclusive education. The interview session would take place in a mutually agreed upon location and should take no more than 45 minutes. With your permission, the interview will be audio- recorded to facilitate collection of information, and later transcribed for analysis. If you would prefer not to have your responses audio –recorded, you will be given the option of having your responses written exactly in the same words. After the interview has been

completed, I will send you a copy of the transcript to give you an opportunity to confirm the accuracy of our conversation and to add or clarify any points that you wish.

Further to this, I would like to see documents such as the inclusive policy and student IEPs for a better understanding of inclusive education in the school.

In addition, I would ask your support in distributing my research information letters to all the teachers teaching students with SEN in the general education classrooms, all students with SEN from the general education classrooms and their parents.

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may decline to answer any of the interview questions if you so wish. Further, you may decide to withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences by advising the researcher. If you withdraw, I will do my best to remove any information relating to you, provided this is practically achievable.

I will take particular care to ensure the confidentiality of all data gathered for this study. I will also take care to ensure your anonymity in publications of the findings. Your name will not appear in any thesis or report resulting from this study, however, with your permission anonymous quotations may be used.

All the data will be securely stored in password protected facilities and locked storage at the University of Canterbury for five years following the study. After that time all written information related to this study and your participation in it will be destroyed by shredding. All versions of electronic copies will be deleted and erased from my laptop. There are no known or anticipated risks to you as a participant in this study.

A summary of my research will be made available to you and to your school.

University of Canterbury of Educational Research Human Ethics Committee has reviewed and approved this study. If you have any questions about the study, please do not hesitate to contact me (details above) or my supervisor Dr Missy Morton ([missy.morton@canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:missy.morton@canterbury.ac.nz)). If you have a complaint about the study, you may contact the Chair, Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, University of Canterbury, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch ([human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz)).

If you agree to participate in this study, please complete the attached consent form and leave it in the envelope provided. The consent form will be picked by me by 15<sup>th</sup> September 2011.

I am looking forward to working with you and thank you for taking time to read this letter.

Yours Sincerely,

Badhoora Naseer (Master's student)



Telephone in the Maldives: +960.....

Email: [badhoora.naseer@pg.canterbury.ac](mailto:badhoora.naseer@pg.canterbury.ac).

1 July 2011

**Developing inclusive education: How does it look in one primary class in the Maldives**

**INFORMATION LETTER FOR PARENTS**

Dear

I am a Master's student in the School of Educational Studies and Human Development at the University of Canterbury conducting research under the supervision of Dr Missy Morton and Professor Garry Hornby.

This year as part of my study, I propose to undertake a research project investigating the process of teaching students with special education needs in general education classrooms.

With this research, I intend to explore your experiences, opinions and feelings relative to educating students with SEN in regular classes. Further to this, the study will investigate the knowledge and skills primary teachers believe they need to be effective in their role. I hope the reflections of the process will help to identify barriers to learning and/or successful strategies that promote learning for students with special education needs being educated in general classrooms.

As a participant in this study, you will be invited to two meetings for a group interview that will each last no more than 45 minutes. Each interview would take place in a mutually agreed upon location. All interviews will be audio recorded to facilitate collection of information, and later transcribed for analysis. In the second meeting, a copy of the transcript will be provided to you to give you an opportunity to confirm the accuracy of our conversation and to add or clarify any points. In the meeting you will be asked about your

experiences with your child in this school, the role you play in the education of your child and the kind of support provided by the school that has been most beneficial to your child.

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may decline to answer any of the interview questions if you so wish. Further, you may decide to withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences by advising the researcher. If you withdraw, I will do my best to remove any information relating to you, provided this is practically achievable. The interview will be audio recorded to facilitate collection of information, and later transcribed for analysis. In the second meeting, a copy of the transcript will be provided to you to give you an opportunity to confirm the accuracy of our conversation and to add or clarify any points. I will take particular care to ensure the confidentiality of all data gathered for this study. I will also take care to ensure your anonymity in publications of the findings. Your name will not appear in any thesis or report resulting from this study, however, with your permission anonymous quotations may be used.

All the data will be securely stored with me for five years following the study. After that time all written information related to this study and your participation in it will be destroyed by shredding. All versions of electronic copies will be deleted and erased from my laptop. There are no known or anticipated risks to you as a participant in this study.

A summary of my research will be made available to you and to your school after I complete my studies.

University of Canterbury of Educational Research Human Ethics Committee has reviewed and approved this study.

If you have any questions about the study, please do not hesitate to contact me (details above) or my supervisor Dr Missy Morton ([missy.morton@canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:missy.morton@canterbury.ac.nz)).

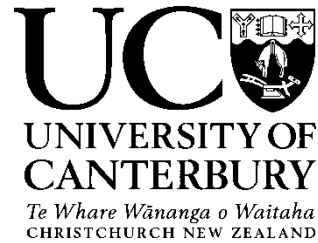
If you have a complaint about the study, you may contact the Chair, Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, University of Canterbury, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch ([human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz)).

If you agree to participate in this study, please complete the attached consent form and leave it in the envelope provided. The consent form will be picked by me by 15<sup>th</sup> September 2011.

I am looking forward to working with you and thank you for reading this letter.

Yours Sincerely,  
Badhoora Naseer  
(Master's student)





Telephone in the Maldives: +960.....

Email: [badhoora.naseer@pg.canterbury.ac](mailto:badhoora.naseer@pg.canterbury.ac).

1 July 2011

**Developing inclusive education: How does it look in one primary class in the Maldives?**  
**INFORMATION LETTER FOR STUDENTS AND THEIR PARENTS**

Dear

I am Badhoora Naseer. I am doing a project on inclusive education at the University of Canterbury, New Zealand. As part of the project, I would like to talk to you about your learning in this school. You will be invited to two meetings that will each last for about 45 minutes. With you, there will be about five other students in the meeting. This meeting will take place in the school in a convenient time for you.

In the meeting, I will be asking you to talk about what you think about your learning in the school, the work you do in the school, your friends and what you plan to do in the future. The group discussions from the meeting will be audio-taped.

You can choose not say anything if you do not want to answer a question in the meeting.

I think your experience and ideas are important. But if you do not want to come to the meeting to talk about your school, learning and friends, that is fine too.

Your Mum/Dad and teachers have also been asked to help. When I talk to other people about your school work and thoughts I will not use your name or your mum/dad's or teacher's names. If you want to know more about this you can talk to your mum/dad or teachers at school.

If you change your mind later and do not want to take part in this project, that is fine, too. All you have to do is to tell your Mum /Dad or teacher or me. Also if you are worried or would like to ask a question about this project, you can talk to your mum/dad or the teacher or me.

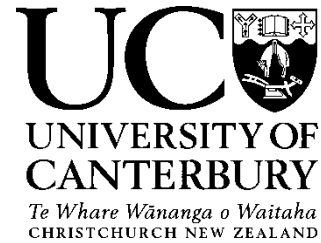
The College has a special committee to look at my work. University of Canterbury of Educational Research Human Ethics Committee has reviewed and approved this study.

If you have a complaint concerning the manner in which this research project is conducted, you can contact the Chair of the University of Canterbury Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch ([human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz))

If you agree to participate in this study, please complete the attached consent form and leave it in the envelope provided. The consent form will be picked by me by 15<sup>th</sup> September 2011.

Thank you for reading this letter

Badhoora Naseer.



Telephone in the Maldives: +960.....

Email: [badhoora.naseer@pg.canterbury.ac](mailto:badhoora.naseer@pg.canterbury.ac).

1 July 2011

**Developing inclusive education: How does it look in one primary class in the Maldives?  
INFORMATION LETTER FOR IN-DEPTH STUDY CLASS TEACHERS**

Dear Primary Teacher,

I am a Master's student in the School of Educational Studies and Human Development at the University of Canterbury conducting research under the supervision of Dr Missy Morton and Professor Garry Hornby.

I would like to invite you to participate as an in-depth study participant in my research, exploring the process of educating students with Special Education Needs (SEN) in regular classrooms (inclusive education).

With this research, I intend to explore your first hand experiences, perspectives and feelings relative to teaching students with SEN in regular classes. I also propose to explore the successes and challenges of inclusive education. Further to this, the study will investigate the knowledge and skills primary teachers believe they need to be effective in their role. I hope the reflections of the process will help to identify barriers to learning and/or successful strategies that promote learning for students with special education needs being educated in general classrooms. Therefore, this study has the potential to identify strengths and gaps in the way in which teachers are currently prepared in the Maldives. Hence the results can be used for initial teacher education. The results may also be important when designing professional development opportunities for in service teachers in primary schools.

As a participant of this study, you will be interviewed twice individually about your role as an inclusive educator. Each interview session would take place in a mutually agreed upon location and should take no more than 45 minutes. All interviews will be audio recorded to facilitate collection of information, and later transcribed for analysis. In the second meeting, a copy of the transcript will be provided to you to give you an opportunity to confirm the accuracy of our conversation and to add or clarify any points.

Further to this, I would spend about four hours over a couple of days in your class in order to understand your role better. In addition, you will be asked to share documents such as lesson plans, schemes of work, and student IEPs with the researcher for a better understanding of inclusive education in your classroom.

I would also ask you to distribute my research information sheets to students with SEN in your class and their parents.

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may decline to answer any of the interview questions if you so wish. Further, you may decide to withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences by advising the researcher. If you withdraw, I will do my best to remove any information relating to you, provided this is practically achievable.

I will take particular care to ensure the confidentiality of all data gathered for this study. I will also take care to ensure your anonymity in publications of the findings. Your name will not appear in any thesis or report resulting from this study, however, with your permission anonymous quotations may be used.

All the data will be securely stored in password protected facilities and locked storage at the University of Canterbury for five years following the study. After that time all written information related to this study and your participation in it will be destroyed by shredding. All versions of electronic copies will be deleted and erased from my laptop. There are no known or anticipated risks to you as a participant in this study.

A summary of my research will be made available to you and to your school.

University of Canterbury of Educational Research Human Ethics Committee has reviewed and approved this study.

If you have any questions about the study, please do not hesitate to contact me (details above) or my supervisor Dr Missy Morton ([missy.morton@canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:missy.morton@canterbury.ac.nz)).

If you have a complaint about the study, you may contact the Chair, Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, University of Canterbury, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch ([human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz)).

If you agree to participate in this study, please complete the attached consent form and leave it in the envelope provided. The consent form will be picked by me by 15<sup>th</sup> September 2011.

I am looking forward to working with you and thank you for taking time to read this letter.

Yours Sincerely,  
Badhoora Naseer  
(Master's student)



Telephone in the Maldives: +960.....

Email: [badhoora.naseer@pg.canterbury.ac](mailto:badhoora.naseer@pg.canterbury.ac).

1 July 2011

**Developing inclusive education: How does it look in one primary class in the Maldives?**  
**INFORMATION LETTER FOR IN-DEPTH STUDY CLASS PARENTS**

Dear

I am a Master's student in the School of Educational Studies and Human Development at the University of Canterbury conducting research under the supervision of Dr Missy Morton and Professor Garry Hornby.

This year as part of my study, I propose to undertake a research project investigating the process of teaching students with special education needs in general education classrooms.

With this research, I intend to explore your experiences, opinions and feelings relative to educating students with SEN in regular classes. Further to this, the study will investigate the knowledge and skills primary teachers believe they need to be effective in their role. I hope the reflections of the process will help to identify barriers to learning and/or successful strategies that promote learning for students with special education needs being educated in general classrooms.

If you are willing to participate, you will be invited to two meetings for a group interview that will each last no more than 45 minutes. Each interview would take place in a mutually agreed upon location. All interviews will be audio recorded to facilitate collection of information, and later transcribed for analysis. In the second meeting, a copy of the transcript will be provided to you to give you an opportunity to confirm the accuracy of our conversation and to add or clarify any points.

In the meeting you will be asked about your experiences with your child in this school, the role you play in the education of your child and the kind of support provided by the school that has been most beneficial to your child.

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may decline to answer any of the interview questions if you so wish. Further, you may decide to withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences by advising the researcher. If you withdraw, I will do my best to remove any information relating to you, provided this is practically achievable.

I will take particular care to ensure the confidentiality of all data gathered for this study. I will also take care to ensure your anonymity in publications of the findings. Your name will not appear in any thesis or report resulting from this study, however, with your permission anonymous quotations may be used.

All the data will be securely stored with me for five years following the study. After that time all written information related to this study and your participation in it will be destroyed by shredding. All versions of electronic copies will be deleted and erased from my laptop. There are no known or anticipated risks to you as a participant in this study. A summary of my research will be made available to you and to your school after I complete my studies.

University of Canterbury of Educational Research Human Ethics Committee has reviewed and approved this study.

If you have any questions about the study, please do not hesitate to contact me (details above) or my supervisor Dr Missy Morton ([missy.morton@canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:missy.morton@canterbury.ac.nz)).

If you have a complaint about the study, you may contact the Chair, Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, University of Canterbury, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch ([human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz)).

I am looking forward to working with you and thank you for reading this letter.

Yours Sincerely,  
Badhooa Naseer  
(Master's student)



Telephone in the Maldives: +960.....

Email: [badhoora.naseer@pg.canterbury.ac](mailto:badhoora.naseer@pg.canterbury.ac).

1 July 2011

**Developing inclusive education: How does it look in one primary class in the Maldives?**  
**INFORMATION LETTER FOR IN-DEPTH STUDY CLASS STUDENTS AND**  
**THEIR PARENTS**

Dear

I am Badhoora Naseer. I am doing a project on inclusive education at the University of Canterbury, New Zealand. As part of the project, I would like to talk to you about your learning in this school. You will be invited to two meetings that will each last for about 45 minutes. With you, there will be about five other students in the meeting. This meeting will take place in the school in a convenient time for you.

In the meeting, I will be asking you to talk about what you think about your learning in the school, the work you do in the school, your friends and what you plan to do in the future. The group discussions from the meeting will be audio-taped.

I also will be in your classroom for up to four hours over a couple of days to see what you learn and how you learn it. I will also be talking to your teacher about the type of work you do in the class and we may look at some of your work as examples.

You can choose not say anything if you do not want to answer a question in the meeting.

I think your experience and ideas are important. But if you do not want to come to the meeting to talk about your school, learning and friends, that is fine too.

Your Mum/Dad and teachers have also been asked to help. When I talk to other people

about your school work and thoughts I will not use your name or your mum/dad's or teacher's names. If you want to know more about this you can talk to your mum/dad or teachers at school.

If you change your mind later and do not want to take part in this project, that's fine, too. All you have to do is to tell your Mum /Dad or teacher or me. Also if you are worried or would like to ask a question about this project, you can talk to your mum/dad or the teacher or me.

The College has a special committee to look at my work. University of Canterbury of Educational Research Human Ethics Committee has reviewed and approved this study.

If you have a complaint concerning the manner in which this research project is conducted, you can contact the Chair of the University of Canterbury Educational Research Human Ethics Committee Private Bag 4800, Christchurch ([human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz))

If you agree to participate in this study, please complete the attached consent form and leave it in the envelope provided. The consent form will be picked by me by 15<sup>th</sup> September 2011.

Thank you for reading this letter

Badhoora Naseer.





Telephone in the Maldives: +960.....

Email: [badhoora.naseer@pg.canterbury.ac](mailto:badhoora.naseer@pg.canterbury.ac).

1 July 2011

**Developing inclusive education: How does it look in one primary class in the Maldives?**

**CONSENT FORM FOR THE SCHOOL PRINCIPAL**

I have been given a full explanation of the study being conducted by the Master's student Badhoora Naseer of the School of Educational Studies and Human Development at the University of Canterbury. I have had the opportunity to ask any questions related to this study, to receive satisfactory answers to my questions, and any additional details I wanted.

**If I agree to participate in this project, I understand that I will be:**

Interviewed individually once for about 45 minutes.

The interview will be audio recorded and transcribed.

Asked to share documents such as the curriculum and inclusive policy of the school.

**I also understand that:**

My participation is voluntary and I may withdraw my consent at any time without penalty by advising the researcher.

Any information or opinions I provide will be kept confidential to the researcher and the supervisors of this project and any published or reported results will not identify me.

Excerpts from the interview may be included in the thesis and/or publications to come from this research, with the understanding that the quotations will be anonymous

All data collected for this study will be kept in locked and secure facilities at the University of Canterbury and will be destroyed after five years.

I will receive a summary of this study. I have provided my email details below for this.

If I require further information I can contact the researcher, Badhoora Naseer. If I have any complaints, I can contact the Chair of the University of Canterbury Educational Research Human Ethics Committee.

With full knowledge of all foregoing, I agree, of my own free will, to participate in this study.

YES  NO

I agree to have my interview audio recorded.

YES  NO

I agree to the use of anonymous quotations in any thesis or publication that comes of this research.

YES  NO

Participant Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Participant Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Email address: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Please return the completed consent form in the envelope provided by 15<sup>th</sup> September 2011 to the researcher.



Telephone in the Maldives: +960.....

Email: [badhoora.naseer@pg.canterbury.ac](mailto:badhoora.naseer@pg.canterbury.ac).

1 July 2011

**Developing inclusive education: How does it look in one primary class in the Maldives?**  
**CONSENT FORM FOR THE SUPERVISOR IN CHARGE OF STUDENTS WITH**  
**SEN**

I have been given a full explanation of the study being conducted by the Master's student Badhoora Naseer of the School of Educational Studies and Human Development at the University of Canterbury. I have had the opportunity to ask any questions related to this study, to receive satisfactory answers to my questions, and any additional details I wanted.

**If I agree to participate in this project, I understand that I will be:**

Interviewed individually once for about 45 minutes.

The interview will be audio recorded and transcribed.

Asked to share documents such as the inclusive policy of the school and students IEPs.

Asked to distribute the information letters of the researcher to all the teachers teaching students with SEN in general education classrooms, students with SEN from the general education classrooms and their parents.

**I also understand that:**

My participation is voluntary and I may withdraw my consent at any time without penalty by advising the researcher.

Any information or opinions I provide will be kept confidential to the researcher and the supervisors of this project and any published or reported results will not identify me.

Excerpts from the interview may be included in the thesis and/or publications to come from this research, with the understanding that the quotations will be anonymous

All data collected for this study will be kept in locked and secure facilities at the University of Canterbury and will be destroyed after five years.

I will receive a summary of this study. I have provided my email details below for this.

If I require further information I can contact the researcher, Badhoora Naseer. If I have any complaints, I can contact the Chair of the University of Canterbury Educational Research Human Ethics Committee.

With full knowledge of all foregoing, I agree, of my own free will, to participate in this study.

YES  NO

I agree to have my interview audio recorded.

YES  NO

I agree to the use of anonymous quotations in any thesis or publication that comes of this research.

YES  NO

Participant Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Participant Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Email address: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Please return the completed consent form in the envelope provided by 15<sup>th</sup> September 2011 to the researcher.



Telephone in the Maldives: +960.....

Email: [badhoora.naseer@pg.canterbury.ac](mailto:badhoora.naseer@pg.canterbury.ac).

1 July 2011

**Developing inclusive education: How does it look in one primary class in the Maldives?**  
**CONSENT FORM FOR THE PARENTS**

I have been given a full explanation of the study being conducted by the Master's student Badhoora Naseer of the School of Educational Studies and Human Development at the University of Canterbury. I have had the opportunity to ask any questions related to this study, to receive satisfactory answers to my questions, and any additional details I wanted.

**If I agree to participate in this project, I understand that I will be:**

Interviewed in a group twice for about 45 minutes each time.

The interview will be audio recorded and transcribed.

**I also understand that:**

My participation is voluntary and I may withdraw my consent at any time without penalty by advising the researcher.

Any information or opinions I provide will be kept confidential to the researcher and the supervisors of this project and any published or reported results will not identify me.

Excerpts from the interview may be included in the thesis and/or publications to come from this research, with the understanding that the quotations will be anonymous

All data collected for this study will be kept in locked and secure facilities at the University of Canterbury and will be destroyed after five years.

I will receive a summary of this study. I have provided my email details below for this.

If I require further information I can contact the researcher, Badhoora Naseer. If I have any complaints, I can contact the Chair of the University of Canterbury Educational Research Human Ethics Committee.

With full knowledge of all foregoing, I agree, of my own free will, to participate in this study.

YES

NO

I agree to have my interview audio recorded.

YES

NO

I agree to the use of anonymous quotations in any thesis or publication that comes of this research.

YES  NO

Participant Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Participant Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Email address: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Please return the completed consent form in the envelope provided by 15<sup>th</sup> September 2011 to the researcher.



Telephone: +64.....

Email: [badhoora.naseer@pg.canterbury.ac](mailto:badhoora.naseer@pg.canterbury.ac).

1 July 2011

**Developing inclusive education: How does it look in one primary class in the Maldives?**

**STUDENT CONSENT FORM**

**PARENT OF STUDENT CONSENT**

**For the student**

I have read the information sheet about the inclusive education project and understand it. I also know that.

I don't have to come to the group interview unless I want to.

I can choose to not say anything if I do not want to answer a question in the interview.

If something is written about me in Badhoora's project it will not have my name on it, and no one will know it is about me.

If I have any questions I can ask Badhoora about them or get Mum to ask her.

No bad things will happen to me if I change my mind about the interview.

I would like to be interviewed.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

**For the Parent**

I have read the information for the thesis project: **Developing inclusive education: How does it look in one primary class in the Maldives.**

I am happy for my child \_\_\_\_\_ to participate in two focus group interviews that will be audio taped and transcribed for this study.

I am satisfied that my child understands what will be required of him or her in this project.

Name of Parent: \_\_\_\_\_  
Signature \_\_\_\_\_  
Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Please return the completed consent form in the envelope provided by 15<sup>th</sup> September 2011,  
to the researcher.





Telephone in the Maldives: +960.....

Email: [badhoora.naseer@pg.canterbury.ac](mailto:badhoora.naseer@pg.canterbury.ac).

1 July 2011

**Developing inclusive education: How does it look in one primary class in the Maldives?**  
**CONSENT FORM FOR IN-DEPTH STUDY CLASS TEACHERS**

I have been given a full explanation of the study being conducted by the Master's student Badhoora Naseer of the School of Educational Studies and Human Development at the University of Canterbury. I have had the opportunity to ask any questions related to this study, to receive satisfactory answers to my questions, and any additional details I wanted.

**If I agree to participate in this project, I understand that I will be:**

Interviewed individually twice for about 45 minutes each time.

The interview will be audio recorded and transcribed.

Asked to share documents such as the lesson plans and student IEPs.

Asked to distribute information letters about the researcher's study to students with SEN from my classroom and their parents.

Researcher will be present in my class for four hours over a couple of days.

**I also understand that:**

My participation is voluntary and I may withdraw my consent at any time without penalty by advising the researcher.

Any information or opinions I provide will be kept confidential to the researcher and the supervisors of this project and any published or reported results will not identify me.

Excerpts from the interview may be included in the thesis and/or publications to come from this research, with the understanding that the quotations will be anonymous

All data collected for this study will be kept in locked and secure facilities at the University of Canterbury and will be destroyed after five years.

I will receive a summary of this study. I have provided my email details below for this.

If I require further information I can contact the researcher, Badhoora Naseer. If I have any

complaints, I can contact the Chair of the University of Canterbury Educational Research Human Ethics Committee.

With full knowledge of all foregoing, I agree, of my own free will, to participate in this study.

YES  NO

I agree to have my interview audio recorded.

YES  NO

I agree to the use of anonymous quotations in any thesis or publication that comes of this research.

YES  NO

Participant Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Participant Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Email address: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Please return the completed consent form in the envelope provided by 15<sup>th</sup> September 2011 to the resercher.



Telephone in the Maldives: +960.....

Email: [badhoora.naseer@pg.canterbury.ac](mailto:badhoora.naseer@pg.canterbury.ac).

1 July 2011

**Developing inclusive education: How does it look in one primary class in the Maldives?**  
**CONSENT FORM FOR THE IN-DEPTH STUDY CLASS PARENTS**

I have been given a full explanation of the study being conducted by the Master's student Badhoora Naseer of the School of Educational Studies and Human Development at the University of Canterbury. I have had the opportunity to ask any questions related to this study, to receive satisfactory answers to my questions, and any additional details I wanted.

**If I agree to participate in this project, I understand that I will be:**

Interviewed in a group twice for about 45 minutes each time.

The interview will be audio recorded and transcribed.

**I also understand that:**

My participation is voluntary and I may withdraw my consent at any time without penalty by advising the researcher.

Any information or opinions I provide will be kept confidential to the researcher and the supervisors of this project and any published or reported results will not identify me.

Excerpts from the interview may be included in the thesis and/or publications to come from this research, with the understanding that the quotations will be anonymous

All data collected for this study will be kept in locked and secure facilities at the University of Canterbury and will be destroyed after five years.

I will receive a summary of this study. I have provided my email details below for this.

If I require further information I can contact the researcher, Badhoora Naseer. If I have any complaints, I can contact the Chair of the University of Canterbury Educational Research Human Ethics Committee.

With full knowledge of all foregoing, I agree, of my own free will, to participate in this study.

YES

NO

I agree to have my interview audio recorded.

YES

NO

I agree to the use of anonymous quotations in any thesis or publication that comes of this research.

YES  NO

Participant Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Participant Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Email address: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Please return the completed consent form in the envelope provided by 15<sup>th</sup> September 2011 to the researcher.



Telephone: +64.....

Email: [badhoora.naseer@pg.canterbury.ac](mailto:badhoora.naseer@pg.canterbury.ac).

1 July 2011

**Developing inclusive education: How does it look in one primary class in the Maldives?**

**IN-DEPTH STUDY CLASS STUDENT CONSENT FORM**  
**PARENT OF STUDENT CONSENT**

**For the student**

I have read the information sheet about the inclusive education project and understand it. I also know that.

I don't have to come to the group interview unless I want to.

I can choose to not say anything if I do not want to answer a question in the interview. If something is written about me it will not have my name on it, and no one will know it is about me.

If I have any questions I can ask Badhoora about them or get Mum to ask her.

No bad things will happen to me if I change my mind about the interview.

Badhoora will be in my classroom for up to four hours over a couple of days to see what I learn and how I learn it.

Badhoora will also be talking to my teacher about the type of work I do in the class and may look at some of my work as examples.

I would like to be interviewed.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

**For the Parent**

I have read the information for the thesis project: **Developing inclusive education: What does it look like in one primary class in the Maldives.**

I am happy for my child \_\_\_\_\_ to participate in two focus group interviews that will be audio taped and transcribed for this study.

I am satisfied that my child understands what will be required of him or her in this project.

I understand that the researcher will be talking with my child's teacher about class work and IEPs.

I give Badhoora, permission to discuss my child's work with the teacher. I understand that the researcher will not be taking any documents out of the classroom.

Name of the parent \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Please return the completed consent form in the envelope provided by 15<sup>th</sup> September 2011 to the researcher.

## **Appendix B: Interview guides**

The following are the broad topics/questions that I would be covering in my interview.

### **For the teachers**

- 1- General information
- 2- Attitudes towards inclusion
- 3- Teaching experiences
- 4- Planning
- 5- Teacher training
- 6- Teacher Relationships with Parents
- 7- Teaching methods and assessment methods

### **For the Special Education Needs Coordinator (SENCO)**

- 1- General information
- 2- Attitudes towards inclusion
- 3- Teaching experiences
- 4- Roles and responsibilities
- 5- Teacher Relationships with parents, teachers and others

### **For the principal**

- 1- General information
- 2- Attitudes towards inclusion
- 3- Parent involvement
- 4- Experiences
- 5- Support

### **For the parents**

- 1-Tell me about your experiences with your child in this school
- 2-Tell me about the things you take part in the school
- 3- What would you say about your relationship with the teachers and other members of the school?
- 4- What kind of support provided by the school has been most beneficial to your children with SEN?
- 5- Tell me about things that you think need to be changed in the school to make it better for

students with SEN.

6- Tell me about the extra things you like to see in the school for making it a better place for students with SEN.

**For the students**

1- Tell me about how you typically spend your day in the school.

2- Tell me about what you like most about this school?

3- Tell me about what do not you like about this school?

4-Tell me about your friends in this school.

5-What are the things that help you most with your learning?

6- Tell me about things that you have thought of doing in the future.



## **Appendix C: The story**

### **JUST BECAUSE I COME TO SCHOOL IN A WHEEL CHAIR.....**

I am an eleven year old school boy. I wear the same school uniform and sit in a similar chair like all the other students from my school. I take the same school books and I am given the same work and assessment at the school. However, I am different from all the others in the school in many ways just because I come to school in a wheel chair.

When I started school, I walked to my class like all the other students. I participated in all the activities my classmates took part in. I got up from my chair to greet the teachers. I went up to the teacher to show my books to her. I walked to my friends whenever I wanted. I climbed up stairs too. Anyway, I always had some difficulties in walking.

According to my parents, as a toddler I walked on tip toes and had difficulty in standing up and doing things such as jumping. I also fell quite often which is the reason I always had bruised knees. When I was at the age of eight, my parents took me to a doctor with the hope of finding a cure for my problem. Though, after many investigations such as X -rays, what the doctor told my parents was not definitely what they wanted to hear. According to the doctor, I am having muscular dystrophy and children with this will not be able to walk after they are twelve years old. This was heartbreaking news for my family. My parents thought about my situation every minute. Although, I was not given details about the situation I was in, one thing was clear. My ability to walk weakened day by day and I found it hard to climb up stairs and even to lift my leg. I started falling more often than before. I got frustrated about this, especially when I fell in the school in front of my classmates or school friends. I can never forget the day I fell on the road while going on a school field trip to a nearby shop with some other classes. It is harder to forget my classmates calling me names like "koru" because I was not able to walk properly and I fell quite a lot.

When my parents talked to the school head about my difficulties, I was transferred to a class from the ground floor. Since then, I have always been in a class in the ground floor. I and my parents are grateful to the school in having my class on the ground floor every year so I can attend school.

It was least bit expected that I was not able to walk as I turned nine. I can remember how I used to run around my house which had lot of space. But now my home routines have taken a different turn. Now all I can do is sit at home. So I sit on my bed and watch TV and play games all the time. My favorite TV channel is POGO. In fact, this is not the only change. Although I do not like a care taker to do everything for me, I have no choice because my

sister and aunt who takes care of me are not able to do some things for me like helping me in the bathroom and lifting me or taking me from one place to the another at home. That is only about moving at home. My movement outside the house has become confined to a wheel chair. Whenever everyone in my family goes out for a walk, they take me in my wheel chair but I do not enjoy these walks. These only make me sad and angry because I just have to sit in my wheel chair. For this reason, sometimes I refuse to go out.

It is not only for walks that I go in my wheel chair, I started coming to school in it too. I do not like coming to school in my wheel chair. No one else comes to school in a wheel chair. In addition, it makes me a lot different from others .All grade five classes are up stairs but not mine because I can't use my wheel chair to go upstairs.

All my classmates go to the library and the PE hall but I do not because I cannot climb up stairs in my wheel chair. All I do while my classmates are gone for the library or the PE hall is sit all alone in the class and wait for them. Sometimes I do read a book. I am glad that my classmates help me with borrowing and returning my library books. I always tell them which book to bring because I can still remember the books in there as I used to go there some time back. However, I always do not get the book I tell them. They tell me that the book is not there or they could not find it. So they just bring me any book. Those times I wish if I could go to the library to make my own choice like my other classmates.

All my classmates look forward for the PE period because it is lot of fun but not for me. Unlike them, in PE periods, I either sit in my class or wait for them to come back or go with them to the school compound, sit in my wheel chair and watch them play. However, sometimes my friends play throw and catch with me when the teacher asks them to but not for very long. After few minutes of throw and catch I watch my classmates enjoy running around, playing games such as football and dodge ball. Every day, I wish if I could play with them. I wish if my class mates play something that I can join in. I wish if I could move around the compound by myself in the wheel chair. But no, I cannot, I always needed someone to push my wheel chair. In school, my classmates push my wheel chair whenever I go in and out of the class. Mainly it is Aswad who volunteers to do the job.

In fact, there is a harder job that neither my classmates nor the teachers can do by themselves when moving me in and out of the class. That is shifting me from the wheel chair to the school chair and vice versa. Every time the teachers call somebody like the school guard or the gardener or both to help with the job. All the time they are not easily available, so sometimes it takes time to find someone to help. Sometimes the teacher would be going from one place to the other in search of someone to help carry me while the class impatiently waits to go out. Whenever I need to go to the toilet the teacher has to go calling for help. The care takers and teachers help but the procedure is chaotic. It hurts me when I

lift my leg so I do not find shifting from one chair to another (class chair to wheel chair and vice versa) very comfortable. For this reason, I do not want to go to the toilet at school. Though, sometimes I had to and when I tried to control, accidents had happened in the class. These are really embarrassing moments. On such days, the teacher would call my parents and they would take me home. I feel so helpless at these times and wish only if I could move by myself. I wish if I do not have to change the chairs. I wish if my wheel chair is suitable for all purposes- coming and going to school, sitting in the class, and moving around the school all by myself. I feel that this way I would be more independent and of less burden for the school

I love singing and used to be in the music club but it is sad that now I am not able to go to the music room. Sometimes the music teacher comes to the class and writes the song on the board for me. Anyway, it is only her music book that she carries to the class but not her musical instruments. Therefore, unlike my classmates, I only get to write the song in my book but not sing it with the music.

In the class, sometimes I become the odd one out and I feel terrible about this. When everyone stands up to greet the teachers, I am seated. When everyone lines up in the corridor at the end of the session, I wait inside the class. When everyone moves their chairs to arrange in rows for tests, I sit in the same position and end up facing the opposite direction.

Now I do not like coming to school at all. For this reason week days do not go very smooth for me. Every night before going to bed, I tell my sister that I would not go to school the next day. In the morning when she calls me, I refuse to wake up and repeat that I do not want to go to school. Despite of my refusal she tries to send me to school which becomes a fight between both of us. Some days, she continues to talk to me to bring me into terms with going to school by offering deals such as buying a game. However, her deals and talks do not work every day. Nowadays I am not regular to school. I hate my sister and teachers pressuring me to do work because I do not understand most of it. I do not get good results in tests too. I wonder if this is all because I come to school in a wheel chair.

Although I am not a happy student, someday I hope to become a happy pilot.

## **Appendix D: Plans with themes**

### **PLAN ONE**

#### CHAPTER 4- Understanding of SEN and inclusion

- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Conceptualizing SEN and inclusion
- 4.3 Explaining SEN and inclusion
- 4.3 Perspectives on disability
- 4.3 Perspectives on Inclusion
- 4.4 Summary

#### CHAPTER 5- Exclusion with in Inclusion

- 5.1 Introduction
- 5.2 What is inclusion and exclusion?
- 5.3 Evidences of inclusion
  - 5.2.1 Inclusion plan
  - 5.2.2 Removing barriers

Enhancing knowledge and understanding about inclusion  
Awareness sessions for the school community  
Professional development for the staff  
Increasing human resources

5.2.3 Building an inclusive school culture  
Providing equal opportunities for students with SEN  
Building the relationship between the general and SEN staff

5.2.4 Making the implicit explicit

Developing an inclusion policy  
Developing a shared vision

5.2.5 Adaptations to curriculum and assessment

5.3 Evidences of exclusion

- 5.3.1 Segregation  
SEN unit- a different school under the same roof
- 5.3.2 Separation

## Chapter 6- Barriers to inclusion

### 6.1 School culture

- 6.1 .1 Physical structure
- 6.1.2 Student teacher ratio

### 6.2 Curriculum

- 6.2.1 Denied access to learning opportunities
- 6.2.2 Trying to meet the needs of all the children through the same curriculum
- 6.2.3 Same planning for all

### 6.3 Assessment

- 6.3.1 Just one way of assessing
- 6.3.2 No modifications to address individual needs

### 6.4 Lack of collaboration between the SEN and the general staff

- 6.4.1 Frustration of the SEN staff
- 6.4.2 Concerns of the general education staff

## **PLAN 2**

### **The journey towards inclusive education: The case of one school in the Maldives.**

#### The extended outline for the finding chapter

This chapter describes the findings from the study. The descriptions of the case of inclusion in the school was developed by combining the information from semi-structured interviews, observations, and documents such as lesson notes, record books, test papers, and the school inclusion policy. The information from each participant was analysed independently, then as groups (school leaders, SEN teachers, general education teachers, parents of students with SEN and students with SEN) and later combined to identify key themes regarding inclusive education in the school context.

The two main themes that occurred from the analysis are: (i) steps taken to move the school towards inclusion, (ii) the barriers to inclusion.

#### 4.1 Steps taken to move the school towards inclusion

The aim of this chapter is to discuss the steps taken to move the school towards inclusion in the two phases, “inclusion as a trial” and “inclusion as a plan”.

##### 4.2.1 Phase one: Inclusion as trial

This section would discuss the initial steps towards inclusion. It also describes the process and the outcomes of the phase.

#### The process

#### The outcomes

##### 4.2.2 Phase two: Inclusion as a plan

This section discusses the more recent steps towards inclusion. It also contains the steps taken to address the challenges from the phase one, including the process, the future plans, and a summary of the chapter.

#### The process

#### Steps taken to address the challenges from phase one

#### Future plans

#### Summary

##### 4.3 The main barriers to inclusion

Under the current system of inclusive education in Hilaalee School, pupils with SEN who are within general education classes and those pupils who have been integrated from the Special Education Unit are marginalized or even excluded from teaching. Therefore, this chapter identifies and talks about the barriers to inclusion in the school. These barriers relate to barriers within the school and in the society that effect inclusion in the school.

#### 4.3.1 Barriers within the school

School structure

Lack of knowledge and understanding about inclusion

Discourse of disability

Meaning of inclusion

#### 4.3.2 Barriers within the society that affect inclusion in the school

Lack of support services

No clear national policies

Lack of funding

In adequate teacher training

summary

Summary of the outline

4.1 Steps taken to move the school towards inclusion

4.2.1 Phase one: Inclusion as trial

4.2.2 Phase two: Inclusion as a plan

4.3 The main barriers to inclusion

4.3.1 Barriers within the school

4.3.2 Barriers within the society that affect inclusion in the school

## Appendix E: Ethics approval



### HUMAN ETHICS COMMITTEE

Secretary, Lynda Griffioen  
Email: [human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz)

Ref: 2011/28/ERHEC

1 August 2011

Badhoora Naseer  
School of Educational Studies & Human Development  
College of Education  
UNIVERSITY OF CANTERBURY

Dear Badhoora

Thank you for providing the revised documents in support of your application to the Educational Research Human Ethics Committee. I am very pleased to inform you that your research proposal "Developing inclusive education: how does it look in one primary class in the Maldives" has been granted ethical approval.

Please note that should circumstances relevant to this current application change you are required to reapply for ethical approval.

If you have any questions regarding this approval please let me know.

We wish you well for your research.

Yours sincerely

pp 

Nicola Surtees  
**Chair**  
**Educational Research HEC**

*Please note that Ethical Approval relates only to the ethical elements of the relationship between the researcher, research participants and other stakeholders. The granting of approval or clearance by the Educational Research Human Ethics Committee should not be interpreted as comment on the methodology, legality, value or any other matters relating to this research.*

University of Canterbury Private Bag 4800, Christchurch 8140, New Zealand. [www.canterbury.ac.nz](http://www.canterbury.ac.nz)



