

The Study on the Dilemma of Teachers in Inclusive Education in China

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Abstract. In recent years, China has made significant strides towards building a more inclusive education system, aiming to ensure that every child, regardless of their physical or cognitive abilities, has access to quality education. This mission is not only driven by a commitment to human rights but also by the recognition that every individual has the potential to contribute meaningfully to society. Yet, while the intention is commendable, the road to achieving a truly inclusive educational landscape is fraught with challenges. One of the primary issues is the shortage of resources. Many educational institutions lack the necessary infrastructure and tools to cater to students with diverse needs. This inadequacy is compounded by a shortage of teachers trained in inclusive teaching methodologies, leading to a disconnect between student needs and instructional delivery. Additionally, the workload for educators, who are now expected to cater to a broader range of student needs without proportionate support, has seen a concerning increase. However, the research has shed light on promising solutions. Comprehensive teacher training programs focusing on special education methodologies can significantly bridge the knowledge gap. There is also a clarion call for enhanced school support, both in terms of infrastructure and personnel. Perhaps most crucially, public awareness campaigns can alter societal perspectives, fostering a more accepting and supportive environment for inclusive education. By meticulously implementing these strategies and continuously evaluating their efficacy, China stands on the brink of revolutionizing its education system, ensuring that no child is left behind.

Keywords: Inclusive education; social support; school support; specialized training.

1. Introduction

In the vast landscape of China's education system, the drive towards inclusive education signifies a pivotal shift, aiming for an equitable framework that caters to all students, including those with disabilities. This transformation, however, is not without its challenges, such as resource constraints, teacher preparedness, and escalating classroom sizes. The collective efforts of educators, policymakers, parents, and the wider community are essential in addressing these challenges [1]. This journey, while promising, is filled with both logistical and sociocultural obstacles. This research delves deep into China's ongoing endeavors in inclusive education, highlighting both the prevalent challenges and the multifaceted solutions being proposed. Drawing from contemporary studies the study underscores the importance of a cohesive approach, unifying all major stakeholders [2,3]. With a grasp on the gravity of the situation, our exploration aims to not only spotlight strategies to strengthen inclusive education in China but also to envision a transformative trajectory for future generations.

2. Inclusive Education in China

Inclusion is meant to maximize the participation of everyone in society to get an education despite their situation, gender, or abilities. This philosophy is aimed at reducing discrimination, especially against students with disabilities. With this initiative, the number of students with disabilities studying in public education has increased to about 49.41% making it a successful tool for empowerment [4]. For this initiative to take root and work, teachers have to adopt the right attitude and implement



inclusive measures in their classrooms and schools in general. Chinese general teachers are for the idea of inclusion as they believe that it is a basic human right for every student to get an education despite their needs and differences. So they promote participation and ensure that they spread positive education values to their students. As such, they also make it a point to care for students with special needs in their classrooms and schools. Most research reveals that the teachers' attitudes play a crucial role in inclusive education as it sets the tone for how these students will be treated in the schools and whether or not they will thrive. Just like in many other countries, there are concerns about inclusive education and students with special needs studying in the same classroom as normal students. The main argument is that as much as they support inclusive education, students with disabilities should be taken to special schools with teachers who are specially trained to deal with them [4].

3. Importance / Expectations Teachers in Integrated Education

Teachers play a pivotal role in integrated education, significantly influencing its quality, especially when catering to children with special needs. Their competency is vital for ensuring the effectiveness of this form of education. Integrated Education seeks to amalgamate general and special education techniques [4]. Central to this is the "dual-role teacher." These educators are expected to comprehend students' diverse developmental needs and excel in classroom management. Their expertise should span from understanding Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) to blending educational and recreational components seamlessly to cater to diverse learning necessities. Collaboration is a cornerstone of effective integrated education. Teachers bridge the communication gap between key stakeholders such as schools, families, and communities. They function as communicators, collaborators, and resource integrators. Especially for children with unique needs, early integrated interventions are crucial. Teachers coordinate with teams comprising clinicians, special education experts, and parents, emphasizing communication to enhance the team's effectiveness. Consistent stakeholder engagement, especially through avenues like Parent-Teacher Meetings, is imperative for the success of integrated education. Teachers in integrated education are also seen as action researchers, driving change through constant innovation. They must engage in reflective practices and use research methodologies to enhance their teaching approaches [3]. The intricate nature of integrated education demands teacher proficiency in diverse research methods and tools. As societal expectations rise for superior education quality, traditional methods fall short. Policies now emphasize the amalgamation of educational, recreational, and medical practices, highlighting the urgency for teachers to hone their research skills and define their professional roles. Continuous research, reflection, and self-directed professional development are paramount for educators to excel in inclusive education.

4. Problems

In addressing the challenges of inclusive education, a primary concern is the insufficient training and resources that critically determine its success. The principle of inclusive education holds significant potential for all students, particularly those with disabilities. However, its efficacy is compromised without the requisite resources to support it. Educators often do not possess the specialized training essential to provide an optimal learning experience for these students, as disabilities can span physical, cognitive, and learning domains [5]. An inadequate educational framework for students with disabilities is detrimental to all stakeholders involved. To effectively assist these students, there is a demand for specialized knowledge, including the utilization of assistive technology, tailored classroom adjustments, and specific learning materials that simplify the educational process for them. Implementing a truly inclusive educational environment entails significant financial and resource investments, underlining one of the chief challenges both educators and students encounter in this educational paradigm.

In China, there exists a prevailing stigma associated with disabilities, rooted deeply in cultural perceptions that view disabilities negatively. Such perceptions pose significant challenges for

educators. Due to these societal prejudices, many parents hesitate or altogether refrain from disclosing their child's disability. The reluctance to share such crucial information complicates the task of educators [6]. The delay in identification exacerbates the challenge for teachers in addressing the needs and ensuring inclusivity within the classroom. Without this knowledge, educators find it difficult to provide the necessary support and foster an inclusive learning environment, particularly in mainstream schools. Consequently, educators often grapple with achieving an optimal classroom balance, unless they undertake a meticulous assessment of each student for potential indicators of disabilities.

The challenge of managing large classroom sizes represents a notable impediment to the successful implementation of inclusive education in China. Particularly in densely populated regions, classrooms are often filled to capacity, presenting educators with the complex task of addressing the diverse needs of each student [7]. It is imperative that these educators distribute their attention equitably, ensuring that no student is marginalized. The presence of students with disabilities compounds this challenge. Such students frequently necessitate a higher degree of individualized attention, demanding that teachers allocate their resources even more judiciously [8]. Moreover, a significant proportion of educators in mainstream schools are not equipped with specialized training to adequately support students with disabilities, hindering the optimal delivery of education to these individuals.

Educators in inclusive environments often grapple with substantially greater workloads than their peers in traditional educational settings. This augmented workload invariably results in heightened stress levels, which could detrimentally impact their instructional efficacy. Tailoring educational plans to accommodate the unique needs of each student mandates increased planning and coordination with relevant specialists [9]. Given the vast spectrum of disabilities, educators are compelled to invest additional time in devising innovative instructional strategies tailored to individual students' needs. Such complexities differentiate inclusive education from conventional educational practices, exacerbating the potential for educator fatigue and burnout [5]. Another distinctive responsibility bestowed upon these educators is the formulation of inclusive assessments. Unlike conventional educational settings where assessment metrics are relatively standardized, inclusive environments require the design of evaluations that justly appraise the progress of each student, without prejudice. The necessity to factor in specific disabilities in these evaluations intensifies the assessment challenge and can further contribute to educator stress and potential burnout.

It is imperative for parents and educators to foster a robust partnership to guarantee the student's academic success. Nevertheless, establishing effective communication between these two parties often presents challenges, as outlined by [7]. As previously highlighted in this paper, there are instances when parents may withhold certain information, thus complicating the educators' roles. Further complicating this dynamic are potential language and cultural differences. Effective communication becomes increasingly challenging when there is a lack of mutual understanding, subsequently adding to the intricacies of an educator's responsibilities.

5. Solutions

To address the challenges encountered by educators in inclusive education within China, it is imperative that policymakers, families, communities, and educators collaboratively develop effective strategies.

5.1. School

In integrated education settings, particularly at preschool and primary levels, there is an undeniable emphasis on the significance of a comprehensive and adaptive teaching approach for inclusivity. Regrettably, many IE teachers, though skilled in general education methods, may not possess the requisite expertise or hands-on experience with special needs students, as evidenced by studies in the Sichuan Province where there's a notable gap between the demand for special educational practices

and the prevailing teacher proficiency. Addressing this requires a multi-pronged approach. According to Smith and Tyler, the meticulous crafting of Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) serves as a cornerstone [10]. These IEPs act as pivotal roadmaps, encapsulating bespoke learning goals and delineating the resources necessary for each student's unique trajectory. This requires teachers to be not just familiar, but actively involved in the IEP development process, ensuring a responsive and anticipatory classroom environment. Thompson et al. further underscore the importance of a dynamic IEP, evolving in real-time with students' needs. Yet, the challenges of inclusivity don't end here [11]. Experts like Xie, Deng, & Zhu advocate for robust teacher training, which could either specialize educators in mainstream schools or extend universally, ensuring all teachers are adept at catering to diverse needs [12]. This "Universal design for learning" (UDL) framework transcends mere modification and emphasizes the importance of recognizing each student's unique capabilities. Gaining proficiency in UDL is achievable through professional development, especially case-based learning. Peer coaching and interdisciplinary collaborations offer another layer of depth, allowing general educators to glean insights from special education experts. Shadowing peers or co-teaching can open avenues to innovative techniques, while the incorporation of technology, such as real-time educational software and advanced analytics, offers insights into student engagement. Tools like eye-tracking and behavioral analytics platforms can illuminate cognitive and affective dimensions of learning, enabling educators to fine-tune their strategies promptly. School administrators need to focus on constructing management systems that furnish a conducive environment for teachers to effectively practice integrated education. This will not only encourage commitment to integrated education but also foster its high-quality development.

5.1.1. Governance mechanisms supporting IE teachers

Administrators need to develop a robust governance structure tailored to the unique demands of IE. This includes establishing well-defined operational procedures and management mechanisms for the placement, assessment, and professional interventions for children with special needs. It's essential to create a clear delineation of roles and responsibilities, along with collaborative frameworks that encourage regular interactions between home and school. This could involve sharing updates on students' developmental milestones and harnessing the active involvement of parents' committees. Effective governance should also entail quality assurance mechanisms to monitor both special needs and general education students' progress, aiming to uplift the teaching experience and facilitate common growth among all children.

5.1.2. Developmental growth systems for teachers

Administrators should also focus on nurturing the professional growth of IE teachers by developing a career ladder specifically tailored for them. This ladder should have various career paths to accommodate IE resource teachers, and general teachers alike. The objective is to provide abundant opportunities for targeted IE training sessions that promote professionalism. Training should not only cover the basics, such as behavioral management techniques for special needs students and individualized education plan development but also adopt a problem-oriented, hierarchical approach. This would cater to the differentiated needs and competencies of various teachers, helping them gain practical and relevant skills swiftly.

5.1.3. Addressing teachers' well-being and workload

School administrators have the added responsibility of monitoring the emotional and professional well-being of teachers, especially those working with special needs children. Recognizing the unique stresses associated with this teaching environment, administrators should aim to provide a supportive, warm, and harmonious workspace. Timely provisioning of necessary educational resources and emotional support can go a long way in enhancing the teaching experience.

5.1.4. Creating synergies and optimal teaching environments

Cultivating an environment of tolerance and equality is essential for the professional development and growth of teachers in integrated education. Acceptance and inclusivity should be the cornerstones

not only within teacher training programs but also throughout the school's educational ecosystem. Schools should proactively advocate for integrated education by experimenting with various implementation models, all while fostering a climate of equality, openness, and acceptance. School administrators play a pivotal role in this endeavor by embracing an inclusive leadership style, shown to positively impact teacher engagement and commitment to integrated education practices [12]. Leadership should be democratic and equitable, valuing the contributions of each teacher while also addressing their developmental needs and offering necessary support for professional growth in integrated education literacy. Moreover, teachers themselves should prioritize establishing a congenial atmosphere characterized by democratic principles, equality, and effective communication, thereby strengthening their sense of belonging and work commitment. Facilitating a collaborative culture is also essential, as it allows teachers to pool their diverse skill sets, mutually address gaps in knowledge or capability, and collectively improve the quality of integrated education

5.2. Social Support

Social support serves as a vital foundation for the successful implementation and quality of integrated education, acting as a robust support system for educators in this field. Refining existing laws and regulations to address the welfare and educational needs of individuals with disabilities is essential. Moreover, the media and public discourse should underscore the unique needs of children requiring specialized education to enhance public awareness and support. By learning from international best practices, a cross-sectoral, multidisciplinary collaboration involving therapists, social workers, and volunteers can further reinforce the educational staff. China, recognizing the significance of integrated education, has seen commendable progress. However, there's an urgent need to advance teacher training by focusing on preschool integrated education and refining the quality of special education curricula. Establishing a specific qualification training and certification system and revising recruitment policies can bolster the professional status of integrated education teachers in China, attracting adept professionals. While the U.S. and the European Union have robust training frameworks for integrated education, China's policies need finer detailing and breadth. A holistic approach to reshape teacher qualification certifications in line with integrated education's specialized demands is crucial. Recent research underscores the importance of boosting financial resources for educational institutions [13]. This increased funding can mitigate the shortage of resources, a major hindrance in inclusive education. An enhanced budget would equip institutions with diverse instructional tools and facilitate optimal student-to-teacher ratios, ensuring tailored attention to each student's unique needs, unlike the compromised quality seen in oversized classes.

Promoting education in cultural awareness and sensitivity is pivotal in reducing prejudice and discrimination towards individuals with disabilities. This will, in turn, embolden parents to seek appropriate assistance for their children with special needs. An effective strategy to diminish the stigma associated with disabilities involves policymakers implementing initiatives that enlighten the community about the nature of disabilities and the significance of education [6]. The likelihood of community members being receptive increases substantially when misconceptions surrounding disabilities are dispelled. Such enlightenment fosters collaboration between community members and educators, ensuring that every child, regardless of their disabilities, has access to quality education. It is imperative for the community to exhibit understanding and acceptance towards individuals with disabilities, actively participating in their support, particularly within familial spheres. Achieving this level of support and understanding ensures that educators are equipped to provide an inclusive learning environment. Embracing cultural acceptance paves the way for a universally inclusive environment, enabling learners with disabilities to flourish. Teachers, in collaboration with stakeholders, can champion this cause, emphasizing the importance of raising awareness and instituting anti-bullying initiatives throughout educational institutions.

A robust partnership between parents and teachers is instrumental in facilitating the educators' tasks. Parents play an invaluable role in creating a supportive learning environment. Parent-teacher collaborations can be fostered through regular communication, educational workshops, and parent

involvement in decision-making processes related to their child's educational pathway. Such collaboration not only enriches the integrated educational experience for the child but also enhances the teacher's understanding of individual student needs. Achieving effective integrated education requires a collaborative approach between parents and teachers, often termed as "home and family co-education." There's a prevalent disconnect, stemming from misunderstandings or misconceptions about integrated education held by both parents and educators. Such misalignments lead to unclear educational objectives and hinder effective communication between the two parties, thereby diminishing the impact of integrated education. To foster parent-teacher collaboration, it's essential to educate parents about the principles and objectives of integrated education. Providing this knowledge helps in cultivating a science-based understanding of the methodology, thereby aligning the educational goals of both families and educational institutions. This mutual understanding is pivotal for enhancing the effectiveness of integrated education programs.

6. Conclusion

Teachers are the cornerstone of inclusive education in China, the other stakeholders are the supporting act who are equally important in ensuring that the system thrives. By training teachers, they are equipped with all the necessary knowledge to not only teach the students but to also interact with them and create a positive and inclusive environment for their learners. Such skills can also be used to mobilize the community on the adverse implications of the stigma against people with disabilities in their society. Additionally, additional resources are needed for the schools that offer inclusive education to ensure that the quality of education remains competitive for the learners. Overcrowding in classrooms is a major problem that consequently leads to learners falling behind since there is no personalized contact with the teachers. The solution to this problem is to allocate more resources so classroom sizes are fitted with a sizable number of students without overcrowding them. If considered, the quality of education in these institutions will significantly improve and everyone involved will benefit from it. Nonetheless, it is important to ensure that these students are protected from cultural stigma against discrimination for them to thrive. These solutions will not only ensure that inclusive education works, but also thrive in China, more students with disabilities will get quality education and teachers will be well compensated for their efforts. Through social support, teachers can collaborate with parents to ensure that the learners receive adequate care and attention even outside of school; a move which will also help improve their academic performance. Teachers' workloads can be reduced to ensure that they are not overwhelmed with their tasks hence encouraging them to put their best foot forward in the classroom. In conclusion, inclusive education will only thrive in China, if these steps are taken to improve the current system of education.

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