

Analysis of Issues Related to the Development of Special Education

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Abstract: Since the last century, China has pursued an inclusive educational strategy to facilitate access to education for special groups. This paper discusses the emergence and benefits of inclusive education in China. The government has been gradually enhancing the system of training special teachers through legislation and policies since the end of the last century. Furthermore, considerable endeavors have been invested in securing the educational entitlement of students with special needs and promoting educational equality for this population. Inclusive education not only provides opportunities for students with disabilities to achieve better performance in both school and community but also enhances cognitive competence for students without disabilities. However, inclusive education also faces challenges such as not rigorous enough enforcement, restricted facilities as well as teaching resources and social prejudice in its expansion. Ultimately, this paper suggests that clearly defined institutional responsibilities, an optimized funding system and the elimination of social prejudices contribute to the execution of inclusive education.

Keywords: Inclusive education, special education, special teacher education

1. Introduction

As the ultimate objective of special education, inclusive education has been developing in China for decades since its introduction. Its development has stepped into a new phase, transforming from focusing on formalistic integration to paying more attention to individual needs and quality [1]. Examining the status quo of inclusive education in recent years is essential to facilitate its expansion. The Compulsory Education Law and the amended Constitution enormously contribute to the progress of inclusive education in China. While inclusive education favors children with disabilities enormously, there is room for progress.

The quality of special education is significantly affected by the competence of special education instructors. Seven decades have been devoted to establishing the legislative framework that supports the development of special teacher education in China through the implementation of numerous acts, regulations, and policies at various levels [2]. Special education emerged and progressed consistently within the public education system after the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949. The provision of education for individuals with physical disabilities was mandated by governments at all levels, as declared by the Chinese Political Council in 1951. To ensure their equitable access to education, the initial education policy for individuals with disabilities was put into effect by the 1994 Act of Education for Individuals with Disabilities. In 2012, the Ministry of Education (MOE)

proposed the Recommendations for the Development of Special Teacher Education, which, for the first time, made comprehensive plans to build up the ranks of special education teachers [3]. The MOE established thorough criteria in 2015 pertaining to the professional competencies and knowledge of educators majoring in special education. Nevertheless, the system for training special education teachers still possesses multiple aspects that require improvement. Based on these, this paper will examine strategies for furthering the advancement of programs for special teacher preparation and inclusive education.

2. Inclusive Education in China

2.1. Emergence

The previous seven decades have seen the establishment of the structure of law for the expansion of curriculums for special educators in China through a multitude of legislation, laws, and policies at all levels.

Steadily increasing in scope, special education teacher training has evolved in parallel with policy support and altered educational attitudes. Special education instructors were frequently selected from regular institutions during the mid-20th century due to the fact that resources for their instruction were contingent on the preparation of general education teachers [4]. Now the system of training special education teachers has been established and is gradually being improved. The level of preparation for special teacher education also has been raised. In the 1980s, secondary special teacher training universities began to emerge and gradually expanded. As of 1998, 35 regular secondary schools had specialized programs in special teacher education, while seven tertiary institutions offered programs in special education. Secondary regular colleges were promoted to the tertiary level after 2000, as special education teacher curriculums were gradually eliminated at the secondary level [2]. A hierarchical pattern of special teacher education has been formed, with specialties and undergraduate degrees as the main focus, and supplemented by master's and doctoral degrees. Overall, special education teacher preparation has progressed to the level of higher special teacher education.

For nearly half a century, the Chinese government has been committed to promoting equality in education for students with special needs. In the last century, one of the most significant difficulties confronting society was the school attendance of children with disabilities, the majority of whom had not received education [5]. To address this, the Learning in Regular Classrooms (LRC) initiative was launched. The official concern regarding enrolling disabled children in LRC was initiated in the 1980s when the Chinese government implemented two significant pieces of legislation: the Compulsory Education Law and the amended Constitution. To mandate that districts establish special schools or classrooms for children of school age who have visual impairments, auditory impairments, or intellectual disabilities, the Compulsory Education Law was implemented. Citizens with disabilities were required to receive education and social assistance under a 1982 amendment to the Constitution. Taken in their entirety, these laws established the framework for China's present special education system [6]. Through these endeavors, policymakers not only further emphasized equality and equity in education but also established the groundwork for inclusive education as the final objective of special education [7].

2.2. Benefits

The benefits of inclusive education for special children have been widely recognized. Moreover, recent research has proved that the benefits resulting from high-quality teaching and advanced pedagogy in inclusive education apply to all children. Evidence suggests that including students with disabilities in conventional classes does not have a detrimental impact on how much time any student spends engaging in education, contrary to previous the common perception. Students without

disabilities learn skills related to motivation, conceptual understanding, and depth of knowledge, in inclusive classrooms where teaching and learning are centered on cooperation. These are skills they would not acquire in the previous learning environment. Furthermore, there are other advantages for individuals with disabilities, such as enhanced academic performance, increased community involvement, better communication and sports skills.

3. Challenges for Inclusive Education

3.1. Ambiguity in Implementation

In 2014, MOE implemented the Special Education Improvement Act with the aim of further developing compulsory education for all children and LRC specifically for children with special educational requirements.

Several provincial and national policies were enacted in the wake of this act's passage, one of which was the "Guidelines for Resource Rooms in Regular Schools" policy document [7]. Although these initiatives have accelerated the development of inclusive education, they can be further enhanced. Given that the policy is not mandatory, some schools have not fully executed the requirements, resulting in some students with disabilities not being able to enjoy their right to education. Establishing inclusion objectives is seriously hindered by the absence of a legal requirement for schools in China to provide education for students with disabilities [8]. Therefore, schools are neither obligated to provide inclusive and mandatory education for students with disabilities, nor are they penalized for refusing services, even if government policy documents support this.

An additional barrier to the progress of inclusive education is the continuous growth of specialized separate schools across the whole of China. In theory, this would make it easier for more disabled students to receive public education. In reality, nevertheless, the very existence of these special education schools may deny these students access to general or inclusive education because they are considered the default schools for students with disabilities.

3.2. Obstacles from Society

According to Deng and Guo's qualitative investigation, there is a discrepancy between inclusive theory and practice as seen through the perspectives of special education administrators [9]. Because special education offered more advanced services than inclusion, it was preferred by the public. The idea that members of special groups have a lower social position is still prevailing in the current Chinese society. According to Qi's research, in both LRC and special school education, disabled children encounter a variety of verbal and behavioral microaggressions [10]. Under this circumstance, microaggressions mean short and commonplace offenses expressed in verbal or behavioral ways.

Besides, some special students may choose not to continue their education in special education schools in China due to their limited availability, rural locations, inadequate facilities, and unprepared teachers [11,12]. In addition to the resistance from people's perceptions, conditioning constraints from less developed areas hinder the realization of inclusive education.

3.3. Implementation Challenges in Special Education

Nonetheless, the growth of special education is always a challenging task to undertake given its scale and scope. There is an urgent need for enhancement in the existing system of developing special education instructors.

Firstly, there is a discrepancy between practice and policy. Special education teacher content is more theoretical than practical. Teachers have to transform the knowledge they have learned into

specific teaching skills, but such skills cannot be directly derived from theoretical knowledge, and can only be improved in actual teaching situations. However, at present, China's special education teacher training is dominated by theoretical courses and the practical courses are neglected to some extent, which is mainly shown by the small proportion of professional practice course credits in the total number of course credits and the short time of professional internship [3].

Secondly, there needs to be a cohesive range of special teacher education models that connect pre-service training with after-service training. While pre-service training provides teachers with basic pedagogical knowledge, post-service training is a crucial step in enhancing the competence of teachers. Post-service training can update teachers' pedagogy in time, enabling them to adapt to the changing requirements for teachers by social development. For example, in recent years, the number of students with new types of disabilities such as autism, emotional behavior, ADHD, and other types of disabilities is increasing. This imposes new demands on teachers, whose knowledge and competence should change subsequently, as should the content of their training [13]. Because China's special education teacher training system does not set relatively uniform standards for training time, content, and requirements, teachers in special education schools have the opportunity to participate in a variety of training activities, but the content of the training lacks wholeness and systematicity, consequently, the phenomenon of post-service training being disconnected from pre-service training has occurred.

Thirdly, currently, most teachers in special education schools earn low salaries. According to Wang and Yang's survey, 17.8 percent of special education school teachers earn less than ¥30,000 a year, and 57 percent earn ¥30,000 to ¥50,000 a year. Only 2.1 percent of teachers earn more than ¥90,000 a year. Overall, there are fewer high-income earners, fewer middle-income earners, and more low-income earners [13]. The inadequacy of the welfare system, which makes it challenging to meet the basic material needs of teachers, is one of the reasons for the inadequacy of the teaching force.

4. Suggestions

4.1. Improving Institutional and Economic Support

4.1.1. Clarifying Institutional Responsibilities in the Law

To address the issue of ambiguity in policy, the wording used in China's implementation of the LRC model should be more mandatory. The responsibility of educational institutions to accept children with disabilities into their schools should be clarified in the relevant policies [1]. In fact, due to ambiguity in the related legislation, applications for enrolment in public schools by special children are often rejected. If public schools had a legally required, rather than recommended, obligation to provide education to students with special educational needs under the LRC model, these students would have access to the educational resources available to the general student.

4.1.2. Optimizing the Allocation of Education Funds

The promotion of inclusive education practices requires funding, so it is imperative to improve the funding mechanism for special education. Firstly, the standard of funding subsidies for students with disabilities should be raised moderately. Secondly, local governments can set up special subsidies to increase the efficiency in the utilization of funds. Third, non-profit social welfare organizations can be encouraged and guided to provide special education for disabled people to ease the pressure on inclusive education.

4.2. Eliminating Prejudice against Students with Disabilities

Regarding the discrimination that occurs in society against students with disabilities, the government or relevant organizations should conduct publicity to make people aware that children with special needs also have the right to sit in the same classroom as normal children and enjoy the same educational resources [1]. When it comes to reducing discrimination against students with disabilities at source, then discrimination against disabled people needs to be alleviated first. Some measures are feasible such as adapting work content for people with disabilities and enacting legislation requiring employers to reserve a certain proportion of jobs for them. To attain a balance between theory and practice in teacher preparation programs, the proportion of course grades can be modified. More coherent curriculum design is needed to help teachers master pedagogy. Salaries for special teachers should also be increased appropriately.

4.3. Improving the Special Teacher Education System

Firstly, more practice course credits should be added and the hours of practical courses such as educational internships should be expanded in teacher training to enhance teachers' ability to apply pedagogical methods in realistic contexts. Secondly, training courses for special education teachers need to be designed more appropriately. Relatively unified standards need to be established to make training content more systematic and consequently ensure the integration of pre-service training and post-service training. Thirdly, it is necessary to increase salaries and allowances for special education instructors. Hence, the initiative and motivation of educators will increase, as will the appeal of the profession of special education instructing.

5. Conclusion

Given that the final target of special education remains to be inclusive education, demonstrating concern for special education groups is one of the crucial steps towards inclusive education. Despite the implementation of regulatory measures, policies, and acts at various levels of government, there remain unfinished tasks. This paper explores potential obstacles that may impede the progress of inclusive education. These barriers include vague standards for policy implementation, widespread social prejudice against disabled groups, and insufficient facilities and teacher resources in underdeveloped areas. Additionally, an enhancement to the special education teacher training system is necessary. For instance, teacher preparation programs prioritize theoretical instruction over practical application, and the integration of concepts across courses lacks adequate coherence. The poor material compensation for educators renders this profession unappealing, aggravating the scarcity of qualified personnel.

In light of these concerns, this paper proposes potential remedies, including the establishment of legislation and regulations that precisely define the obligations of institutions, the optimization of subsidy utilization structures, and the enforcement of legislation protecting the employment rights of individuals with disabilities to mitigate prejudice. Further endeavors are required to ensure that reforms throughout the education system and societal developments offer individuals with disabilities more opportunities.

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