

# ***Research on the Current Status and Obstacles of Inclusive Education Implementation in China***

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**Abstract.** As an important concept in contemporary education, inclusive education has received widespread attention worldwide. In recent years, China has gradually introduced the concept of inclusive education in policy promotion and educational practice, but there are still many shortcomings in the actual implementation process. This study investigates the idea of inclusive education as well as the advancements and advantages demonstrated in its implementation in China. At the same time, the primary obstacles to China's adoption of inclusive education are highlighted in this article: teachers still lack sufficient understanding and professional competence, making it difficult to effectively carry out differentiated instruction; the resource support system remains inadequate, with shortages in funding, teaching materials, and training; and the level of public awareness is limited, as the concept of inclusive education is not fully understood, making it difficult to build a supportive educational environment. Based on these findings, this article proposes enhancing teachers' professional capacity, strengthening policy guarantees and resource allocation, and raising public awareness to support China's inclusive education system's long-term growth.

**Keywords:** Inclusive Education, Special Education, Education Equity, Teacher Training for Inclusive Education

## **1. Introduction**

With the progress of society, the global education level is also developing rapidly. Under the condition that all students, regardless of their physical condition, intelligence level, gender, socio-economic background, language, ethnicity, religion, or any other differences, have the right to receive the same high-quality education and learning in the same educational environment, the concept of inclusive education has been promoted and implemented all over the world [1]. This does not refer to providing separate care for students in special education, but rather to adjusting the education system itself so that it becomes inclusive of all students with diverse needs [1]. Since 1994, when the Salamanca Statement first explicitly called for inclusive education for all children, one important metric for gauging educational modernization is inclusive education, according to international documents like the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Article 24 of the Convention specifically stipulates that persons with disabilities are entitled to equal rights to education, emphasizing that states should ensure access to inclusive, high-quality, and non-

discriminatory education at all levels [2]. In China, although increasing attention has been given to the equal right to education for persons with disabilities, the development has thus far primarily focused on integrated education, including strengthening individualized support services and increasing financial investment to support early intervention and education for children with disabilities [3, 4]. This is just the first step in supporting the development of special education. Although the core concepts of inclusive education and integrated education both pursue educational equity and human rights, inclusive education transcends integrated education and is the goal direction for future educational development. Based on this, this article will explore the current situation and obstacles of inclusive education in China.

## **2. The concept of inclusive education**

### **2.1. The characteristics of inclusive education**

Inclusive education is a new concept based on integrated education and is an important concept in the contemporary education field. It emphasizes that the education system should be reformed in terms of systems, curricula, teaching methods, etc., to guarantee that every student has access to equitable, superior learning opportunities in the same setting [5]. A significant feature of inclusive education is that it not only addresses the issue of whether students enter school, but also whether they can learn well and be truly accepted after entering school. It emphasizes that the education system adapts to students, rather than students adapting to the teaching system. This student-centered philosophy embodies the value pursuit of educational equity and aims to promote the comprehensive development of all children.

Unlike traditional special education, inclusive education is not only aimed at children with disabilities or special needs. The coverage of inclusive education is very wide. It includes groups that may be left out or pushed aside because of gender, economy, culture, race, religion, or other reasons.

### **2.2. The benefits of inclusive education**

From the perspective of teachers, inclusive education also holds significant importance. Faced with a diverse classroom, teachers need to constantly explore and design more diverse teaching methods in the teaching process to meet the learning needs of different students. This process not only enhances teachers' professional abilities but also drives them to reflect on and improve teaching strategies through student feedback and communication with peer teachers in practice. With the accumulation of experience, teachers will gradually shift their teaching and educational concepts towards a more student-centered and inclusive direction, thereby improving the overall quality of education. It can be seen that inclusive education not only has a profound impact on students' development, but also promotes the growth of teachers and the progress of the education system unconsciously [6].

### **2.3. The current situation of inclusive education**

Driven by the concept of inclusive education, the goals of the Chinese education curriculum have gradually shifted from simply emphasizing the imparting of basic knowledge and skills to focusing on the comprehensive development of children, paying more attention to the cultivation of emotions, attitudes, values, and social skills, while also emphasizing personality development and potential exploration [7]. With the development of inclusive education in China, in response to the needs of

different children, curriculum content is becoming increasingly diverse and personalized, indicating that the concept of inclusive education is gradually permeating into the curriculum system.

At the policy level, the Chinese government has significantly increased its emphasis on special education and inclusive education. For example, the law clearly stipulates that ordinary schools must accept disabled students who can adapt to learning, and legally guarantee their right to equal enrollment [3]. In addition, the country is continuously increasing its investment in special education, not only providing financial and policy support, but also gradually strengthening the construction of teachers for inclusive education.

At the practical level, cooperation between teaching staff and families is also constantly strengthening. Many schools place greater emphasis on communication between teachers and parents, encouraging both parties to participate in student learning support, thereby creating a synergistic effect and providing better guarantees for children's growth. In terms of teaching methods, teachers have begun to use assessment methods such as Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) to analyze the specific needs of students and families under the premise of differentiated and personalized teaching, and provide the most suitable teaching support when conditions permit. This not only enhances teachers' ability to cope with diverse student groups but also improves the learning outcomes of children with special needs.

### 3. The shortcomings of inclusive education in China

Inclusive education is gradually being promoted and developed worldwide, but compared to some countries with more complete education systems, China's development in special education and inclusive education still lags. This gap is not only reflected in the institutional and resource levels, but also in the attitudes and practices of the teacher community. While some teachers in China acknowledge that children with special needs have the cognitive right to attend regular classes, they still tend to think that special education schools are better suited for practical actions and teaching methods; In contrast, many teachers overseas exhibit a generally positive attitude and are willing to actively accept and support the integration of students with special needs into the classroom [8]. The limited special education classroom settings and the absence of structured information and hands-on training for instructors in inclusive education are other contributing factors to this attitude problem.

#### 3.1. Insufficient level of teachers

The attitude of teachers is often a key factor in the successful implementation of inclusive education. A positive attitude can help teachers better understand and support students with special needs, thereby creating a supportive and inclusive classroom environment; On the contrary, if teachers lack confidence or have concerns, it can easily affect teaching effectiveness and the implementation of inclusive education [9]. In fact, in the process of promoting integrated education and inclusive education in China, most teachers and teacher trainees generally hold a positive and supportive attitude. They generally agree that inclusive education can benefit all students, not just those with special needs [10]. This positive attitude indicates that teachers have the potential to accept and promote inclusive education. Compared with some nations' research outcomes, Chinese teachers' attitudes still have some complexity and, in certain instances, some teachers bear some negative or contradictory feelings for actual teaching situations [8]. For example, it has been found that some Chinese teachers are more negative towards those students who may exhibit challenging behaviors, while they are more tolerant of those students with learning or physical disabilities [8]. This implies

that variables such as teachers' instructional experience, teaching subject matter, and social environment can all affect their attitudes and confidence toward inclusive education [9, 11].

Apart from attitude issues, teachers also have significant deficiencies in their understanding of the concept of inclusive education and professional competencies. Although most teachers are in favor of inclusive education, their understanding of its core concepts, policy basis, and feature details is not deep enough. They just think of inclusive education as "allowing special needs students to go to ordinary schools" [10]. At the practical level, most teachers cannot flexibly adjust lesson plans, apply differentiated instruction, and use assistive technologies, which makes them feel uneasy or powerless when facing students with special needs [9, 10]. Academic research has shown that a lack of professional knowledge and skills has become a major obstacle to the development of inclusive education in China [11].

### **3.2. Insufficient resource support**

Apart from the teacher's competence and attitude, the insufficient resource support is also a significant constraint to restrict inclusive education in China. Although corresponding policies have been advanced by China in recent years, there is still a gap in implementing them, and some regions are without supporting measures and supervision mechanisms, and thus find it difficult to practice inclusive education in schools [7].

Specifically, budget limitations and hardware status have led to a majority of schools lacking required accessibility facilities and ancillary equipment, especially the urban and rural investment gap. In the curriculum and textbooks, there are currently few resources that are able to accommodate students' special needs of various types, thereby making it challenging for teachers to carry out differentiated instruction. In terms of teacher training, existing coverage and continuity in training are lacking, lacking in practical advice, and teachers typically become perplexed in actuality. Overall, the shortcomings in the enforcement of policy, funding, textbook development, and instructor training make it difficult for inclusive education to achieve maximum results in actuality, as well as compromise its equity and inclusivity [7].

### **3.3. Lack of social awareness**

In China, the overall social atmosphere and public awareness level are also factors that hinder inclusive education. At present, the public's understanding of inclusive education is still very limited, and many people even directly equate it with special education or integrated education, lacking understanding of the core goals and basic connotations [7]. This leads to a lack of broad support for inclusive education at the societal level.

Insufficient social cognition is also manifested as prejudice and misunderstanding towards students with special needs. Some people believe that their presence will burden ordinary classrooms and are therefore unwilling to truly accept these students. This concept not only weakens society's recognition of inclusive education but also leads to a lack of enthusiasm among parents and schools in practice. This leads to difficulties in creating an inclusive and equal atmosphere in the educational environment, and special needs children find it difficult to gain a sense of belonging and participation in school life [7]. Due to these numerous flaws, inclusive education has not received the necessary public support or social incentive, which has indirectly prevented policies and resources from fulfilling their intended function.

## **4. Suggestions for improving inclusive education in China**

### **4.1. Enhancing the professional competence of teaching staff**

In education, teachers are always the key to teaching quality and fairness. The degree of professionalism that the teachers have not only affects the effectiveness of teaching within the class, but most importantly, it has a direct bearing on whether inclusive education can indeed be achieved. The mission of inclusive education is to provide all children, regardless of their differences in ability or terms of origin, with equal and quality learning opportunities within the same school environment. Thus, training and capacity building in inclusive education need to be strengthened. The government, education agencies, and schools should arrange and advertise proper professional training, seminars, and other platforms so that instructors already serving can learn and exchange ideas. Organizations in schools should encourage teachers to enroll in courses on inclusive education and provide teachers with chances and resources to post samples of lesson plans for comment and suggestions. This is not only capable of imparting professional competency to teachers, but can also force the atmosphere of the entire teaching staff. For future teachers, schools have to establish courses suitable for inclusive education, even incorporate them into compulsory courses, to ensure all the graduates are able to have basic literacy in inclusive education. By establishing a stable foundation in the learning process, future teachers can rebound more quickly and nimbly from shifts in education policies when they enter the work environment, and also put inclusive and equitable education concepts into practice consciously.

### **4.2. Policy guarantee and resource allocation**

In the development of inclusive education, policy guarantees and resource input are also essential bases. As a mirror of educational equity, the Chinese government should strengthen its attention to special education and increase relevant investment, providing firm guarantees for deepening the development of special education and inclusive education. Firstly, the country should further increase its emphasis and investment in special education at the compulsory education and preschool levels, so that disabled children or other children with special needs could have equal opportunity to access learning. This not only includes improving the hardware facilities of schools, such as auxiliary learning equipment and resource classrooms, but also should cover the development of teaching materials and activity design suitable for special needs children, so that teachers can be more flexible in teaching according to the needs of different students in the classroom, for the most effective teaching. At the same time, the government can direct schools to improve the procedure of inclusive education by creating financial support or offering incentives like awards, in addition to creating laws mandating that schools accept. In the early stages of practice, schools can also be equipped with professionals to guide teachers. Through feedback, teachers can better design classrooms and grow. Not only schools, but also the government should establish a more comprehensive subsidy system for students and families with special needs, provide economic support when necessary, reduce their burden and concerns, and attract more teachers, parents, and members of society to actively understand and participate in inclusive education.

### **4.3. Enhance social awareness**

Currently, in China, the public's awareness of inclusive education is still relatively low, and many people even directly believe that it is the same as special education or integrated education, without

a fundamental awareness of the main objectives of inclusive education. Therefore, improving social awareness is necessary to create a supportive and positive educational environment and to promote the smooth adoption of inclusive education. The idea of inclusive education should be promoted by the government through a variety of platforms. With the widespread popularity of social media in modern society, the government and education departments can use short video platforms and other means to publish popular science content and cases about inclusive education, allowing the public to have a more intuitive understanding. At the same time, holding lectures, flyers, or related activities in public spaces such as communities can also help ordinary families and families in need better understand and accept the concept of inclusive education. Lectures and volunteer activities can be held in universities to encourage students to pay attention to inclusive education and engage in practical activities that put themselves in the shoes of others. Additionally, promotional posters and events can be posted on commemorative days such as International Day of Persons with Disabilities to promote inclusive education and raise awareness through the social attention of public holidays. The main purpose of increasing social awareness is to create a positive atmosphere where both special needs children and ordinary children can grow up together in an environment free from prejudice and discrimination, rather than just letting the public know what inclusive education is.

## 5. Conclusion

In brief, inclusive education, as an important manifestation of education and social justice, has increasingly been implemented in China's educational system and has realized successful progress in curriculum goal transformation, policy change, and practical innovation. Regardless, there are still significant shortcomings in China's inclusive education system in terms of teacher cognition and professional competence, government resource support, and social cognitive atmosphere. These drawbacks will limit the improvement of education quality and also limit the experience of special needs children in school. So in the face of these issues, China's inclusive education can be improved in multiple aspects, such as training teachers' attitudes and professional levels; increasing investment in government resources and developing teaching materials; and enhancing social awareness to create a positive atmosphere. With the continuous development of educational concepts and society, inclusive education in China has the opportunity to be truly implemented and developed, providing every student with a high-quality and non-discriminatory learning environment and promoting social progress.

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