



RESEARCH ARTICLE

General Teachers' Attitude toward Inclusive Education in Yunnan Province in China

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Introduction

Inclusion is philosophy based on values aiming to maximize participation of all in society and education by minimizing exclusionary and discriminatory practices. There were 123,500 students with disabilities enrolled in public schools in 2018. The total number of students with disabilities studying in publishes schools were 665,900, 329,100 out of whom were studying in general schools receiving inclusive education. The proportion of students with disabilities receiving inclusive education in China was 49.41% [1], which shows that inclusive education is one of the main educational placements for students with disabilities. Inclusive education plays a key role in the empowerment of those who are marginalized.

Teachers' attitude is one of the most important factors implementing inclusive education [2,3]. Conceptually, Chinese general teachers accept the idea of inclusive education, that is, human beings' pursuit of freedom and equality of human rights [4]. Inclusion means the acceptance and respect for each child's special endowments and needs, and the difference and diversity of students. They emphasize participation, reject exclusion and share equal positive education values [5]. Peng and Lei [6] clearly pointed out that inclusive teachers should have the quality of caring when teaching students with disabilities.

Numerous empirical research studies have been

conducted revealing general teachers' attitude toward inclusive education at home and abroad. In developed countries, research on teachers in the United Kingdom, for example, found that after a teacher professional development training program, there was a significant change in the participating teachers' attitude towards children with special needs entering general classes for inclusive education [7]. Brown-Oyola's study on teachers in Pennsylvania of the United States found there was significant difference of feelings towards inclusive education between general and special education teachers [8]. The former ones scored significantly lower than the latter ones. Canadian teachers have shown mixed attitudes towards inclusive education, which are strongly correlated with school factors such as the support of administrators and adequate career development opportunities. For the teachers who have more knowledge and training, their attitude will be more positive [9]. Developing countries also show emphasis on inclusive education and researchers' pay more attention toward teachers' attitude. Salih's survey on 194 teachers in Turkey found that their overall attitude towards inclusive education was negative, and only 35% of them were willing to accept students with severe learning difficulties into their classroom. Mngo found that Cameroon teachers hold different attitudes towards different aspects of inclusive education, some of whom have negative attitudes towards the placement of students in regular classes and their own teaching ability, while holding positive



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attitudes towards the benefits of inclusive education for exceptional children and class management [10]. Dana investigated teachers' attitude towards inclusive education in South Africa was greatly influenced by the types of barriers for students. Teachers who are given more training and classroom resources to promote inclusive education experience and teaching might have a more positive attitude towards inclusive education. Yaraya, Masalimova, and Vasbieva [11] found that teachers' attitude towards inclusive education depends on their personal commitment, professional dedication and students' learning performance.

There are a large number of studies on teachers' attitude to inclusive education in China as well. Lots of them show general teachers holding a negative attitude towards inclusive education in China. The general primary school teachers, compared with special education teachers, have a negative attitude towards inclusive education [12-14]. It was found that 67.3% teachers do not approve students with special needs studying in general classes [12]. Similarly, Wang, et al. [15] conducted a survey on inclusive education in primary schools and found that teachers and school leaders still had negative attitudes about the development of inclusive education, that is, inclusion would depend on various factors such as students' disabilities and environment. It has been found that teachers, students and parents have a negative attitude on inclusive education, among whom, teachers hold the most negative attitude towards inclusive education [14,16]. Besides, general teachers' attitude towards children with disabilities studying in regular classes is closely related to the type of children's disability, whose order preference of disabilities was physical disabilities, learning disabilities, intellectual disabilities and emotional disabilities [17].

The result on early inclusive education teachers shows the same tendency. Zhao and Xu [18] investigated kindergarten teachers in Guilin and found that 58.21% of the participants agreed that inclusive education improves the development of children with special education needs and 62.69% of them support the view that inclusive education can effectively promote children with special education need's social communication ability. While teachers' acceptance of the enrollment of children with disabilities in kindergarten is low. Only 26.87% of teachers are willing to accept children with disabilities studying in their classes in kindergartens.

On the contrary, some research found that general teachers' attitude towards inclusive education is positive in China [19-23]. Liu, et al. [22] found 98% general primary school teachers in their survey believed that children with special education needs were equal with general children in personality, and 95.8% of the participants believed that children with special education needs have the equal right of education with

their peers. While, 39.6% of them were either negative (19.1%) or doubtful (20.5%) about whether children with special education needs should be enrolled in general schools. 82.6% of them thought that teaching students with disabilities would make teachers feel a lack of accomplishment, and 81.8% participants reported that even if they wanted to teach students with disabilities well, they were worried about their capacity. Consistent with that, Deng [19] investigated 223 general teachers teaching students with disabilities and found 71.07% participants supported inclusive education, while 79.24% of them supported the advantage of teaching students with disabilities studying in special education schools, preferring to choose special education schools as the educational placement for children with disabilities. A survey on teachers' attitude to inclusion in Nanjing found the order scores of four dimensions of inclusion from high to low had inclusive education values (3.51), educational placement (2.49), children's rights (2.35) and teachers' workload (2.12), meaning that although the value of inclusive education was widely accepted, teachers' workload was the main concern for teachers on it. For resource teachers working in Beijing, Shanghai, Jiangsu, Shandong, Guangdong and Sichuan, Feng and Zhu [24] investigated their attitude to inclusive education and found that they achieved an average score 5.13 out of 6 in the dimension of attitude, showing a positive attitude to students with disabilities.

It seems that teachers' attitude to inclusive education is still in the early stages of development in China. Although inclusive education is considered to be the least restrictive environment (LRE) and social justice placement [25-27] teachers showed various opinions on it. Based on Concerns Based Adoption Model, Yan [28] investigated inclusive teachers in Beijing and found that they are on the level of paying attention to the impact and results of the implementation of inclusive education, how to cooperate with others, and how to explore the broader benefits of inclusive education. Unianu [29] found that teachers' inclusive attitude can form and develop supportive teaching conditions and a supportive environment. Malinen, Savolainen, and Xu investigated the attitudes of 451 teachers to inclusive education in Beijing and found the improvement of cooperation skills among teachers could enhance their positive attitude to inclusive education [30].

Overall, the research on teachers' attitude towards inclusive education mainly involves the theories and educational concepts related to inclusive education, the placement of children with special education needs, and teachers' confidence in their own teaching ability, which are teacher's belief of students, teaching belief, and teacher's role belief [31]. Teachers in both developed and developing countries have a positive attitude towards the value of inclusive education, and a negative attitude towards the practice of inclusive education. This is consistent with the attitude of teachers

in inclusive education in China. It has been found that teachers in China widely accept the idea and value of inclusion, while others have a negative attitude towards the placement of children with special education needs in classes. Most of them support the view that students with disabilities should study in special education schools. Most of the research is investigations of primary school teachers, followed by comparative studies on the differences between teachers and other groups in their attitudes towards inclusive education. Improving teachers' attitude towards inclusive education is the core issue that every country should pay attention to when promoting inclusive education, and seems to face the same dilemma; that is, how to improve teachers' support attitude at the practical level of inclusive education.

With the shift from the propaganda of concept to the improvement of quality, more and more research on the inclusive education quality of teachers have been carried out over time, and growing research have paid attention to the inclusive education quality of teachers. Therefore, research on the attitude of general teachers to inclusive education should be explored further in China, which has the biggest education system in the world. It is meaningful to analyze influencing factors and how to promote general teachers' attitude as well.

Research Design

The State Council of China (2016) issued the Outline of the 13th Five-year Plan for Accelerating the Well-off Development of the Disabled, demanding to constantly improve the support and guarantee system of inclusive education. A program of inclusive education was launched in 2017 in Yunnan province. We investigated primary schools teachers' attitude to inclusive education in this study.

Participants and procedure

Data were collected by questionnaires. We contacted the principals of 4 primary schools in Kunming, Yunnan province, who helped to distribute the questionnaires. 300 primary school teachers were selected, and 220 questionnaires were collected; 217 of which were valid, with a recovery rate of 73% and an effective rate of 98%.

The sample consisted of 80.02% females and 19.98% males. 21.5% of the sample had low teaching experience-up to 3 years of teaching; 11.4% of the participants 3-6 years of teaching experience; 20.8% of the participants 6-10 years of teaching experience; and the remaining (46.3%) had high teaching experience-more than 10 years of teaching. There were 8.7% teachers having an education degree of junior college, 83.2% of them with the bachelor's degree and 6.7% of them with the bachelor's degree. 75.2% of the participants graduated from the major of teacher education and the others did not.

Measurement

Questionnaire protocol was self-created based on the questionnaires developed to investigate teachers' attitude to inclusive education by Wei (2000) and Sun (2008), which contained the basic information of the participants, attitude and opinion of educational placement for students with disabilities [12,32]. The reliability coefficient of the questionnaire was 0.74 and the validity coefficient 0.874, indicating that the protocol was proper.

Results

Teachers' attitude to inclusive education

Teachers' experience and knowledge of children with disabilities: More than 60% teachers in the study had experience of teaching children with disabilities,

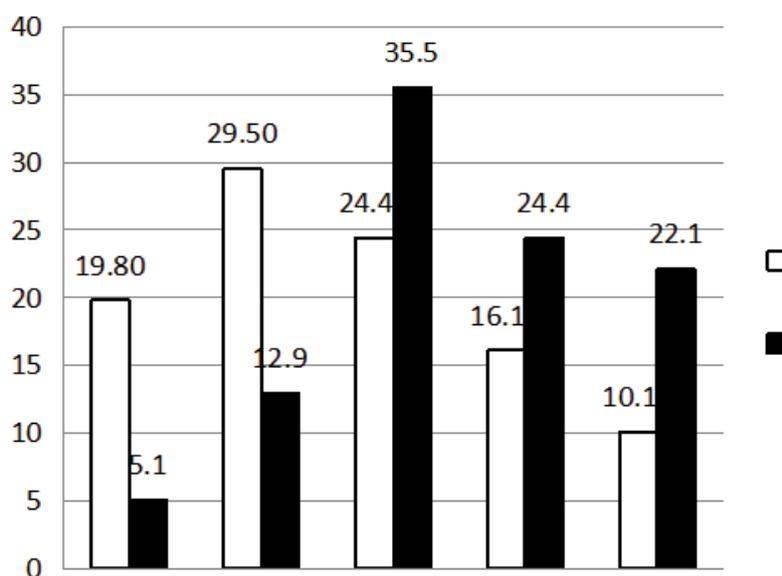


Figure 1: Teachers' acceptance in different conditions.

Table 1: Compassion of teachers' acceptance with various education degree.

Education degree \ Acceptance	Secondary schools (N = 2)	Junior college (N = 22)	Bachelor (N = 180)	Graduate (N = 13)
M ± SD	1.50 ± 0.71	2.50 ± 1.06	2.72 ± 1.28	2.46 ± 1.13
F	0.95			
p	0.42			

out of whom, 33.64% had experience with students with mild disabilities, and 25.81% with students with moderate disabilities. It showed that teachers knew a little about children with disabilities; only 8.29% of them reported had good knowledge of children with disabilities. 76.5% of participants thought it was necessary to be trained of professional knowledge and skills of special education.

Teachers' acceptance of children with disabilities:

The majority of primary school teachers were reluctant to admit children with disabilities into their schools or classes. 49.30% of them were unwilling to accept them, while only 26.2% were willing to enroll them in general schools. When the condition that teachers and environment were well-prepared, the percentage of acceptance raised to 46.5% (Figure 1). A paired T test was used and showed $T = -9.71$ and $p = 0.00$, meaning significant differences of teachers' acceptance between the current situation and a well-prepared inclusive environment.

Teachers' concern of inclusive education: The concerns of ordinary primary school teachers on refusing the enrollment of children with disabilities ranked highest to lowest were lack of professional knowledge and skills in special education (85.71%), failure to teach general students and children with disabilities at the same time (71.89%), lack of teaching equipment for children with disabilities (68.2%), the severe degree of disabilities (45.16%), rejection of general students' parents (40.01%), and others (10.6%).

Influencing factors for teachers' acceptance: Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics of teachers' acceptance with different educational levels. Teachers with a bachelor's degree scored highest, which meant they accepted best for the students with disabilities studying in regular classes; while teachers with a secondary school degree represented maximum rejection for the children with disabilities. Variance analysis found that $F = 0.95$, $p = 0.42 > 0.05$ (as shown in Table 1) showed no significant difference, indicating that the education level of teachers did not affect their attitude towards children with disabilities.

In order to know whether having experiences with students with disabilities would affect teachers' acceptance, T-test was applied (Table 2). Although the teachers having experiences with students with

Table 2: Compassion of teachers' acceptance whether they had experience with children with disabilities.

Experience \ Acceptance	Yes (N = 152)	NO (N = 65)
M ± SD	2.91 ± 1.03	2.60 ± 1.28
T	1.71	
p	0.09 > 0.05	

Table 3: Compassion of teachers' acceptance whether they self-study knowledge of children with disabilities.

Self-study \ Acceptance	Yes (N = 46)	NO (N = 171)
M ± SD	3.39 ± 1.22	2.83 ± 1.07
T	3.05	
p	0.00 < 0.01	

disabilities scored higher than those who did not, there was no significant difference between them.

There were 21.20% of participants who self-studied knowledge of special education. Compared with the teachers who self-studied knowledge of special education and those did not, the acceptance of the former ones were significantly higher than the latter ones.

Discussion

Teachers' knowledge of children with disabilities

It was found that there were still many deficiencies in the education of children with disabilities in general schools, and the teachers were in urgent need of the support of professional knowledge and skills. More than half of them had a basic understanding of children with special needs, while the psychological characteristics of children with disabilities, education methods and education principles and so on were not clear. These findings were consistent with the existing studies [12,33].

Teachers' knowledge of children with special needs was small. This may due to insufficient inclusive education in teacher pre-service training in China. Inclusive education was advocated in the 1990s in China to promote the enrollment of children with disabilities

due to a lack of special schools [34]. Decades witnessed the increase of scale of inclusive education in China while there are only 62 colleges and universities having a major of special education and most graduates work in special education schools rather than inclusive schools. The cultivation of inclusive teachers in higher education is far from adequate for practical needs. The general schools are forced to practice inclusive education due to national and local policies. The general teachers have little or no special education training and lack knowledge and skills in order to work with students with disabilities. Even the trained general school teachers still feel they are not adequately trained to provide inclusive education services [35].

Besides, the low level of teachers' knowledge on inclusive education may be related to the location of the schools. The participants were from primary schools in Kunming, which is in the southwest of China. Wang, et al. found that the quality of inclusive education of teachers in north China is better than ones in the south [36]. This may be affected by the differences in educational development level, special education platform support, and inclusive education development level in different regions. Nowadays, the promotion of inclusive teachers' quality on one hand rely on local normal colleges in pre-service training for college students, and on the other hand, rely on teachers' in-service training in teacher education training centers based on regional comprehensive strength strong normal universities. There is only one college and one university in Kunming to cultivate and train inclusive teachers.

Teachers' acceptance attitude to children with disabilities

The results of the survey show that the majority of ordinary primary school teachers are negative about children with special needs entering ordinary schools. One of the reasons may be teaching students with disabilities in regular class increases the workload of general teachers. They should change their original knowledge structure and teaching skills, and make individualized education plans for special children to meet their special needs in order to provide proper education for children with disabilities, which will increase their workload [37,38].

Besides, for the ordinary primary school teachers who have a basic understanding of children with special needs, this is not enough for them to deal with the emotional and behavior problems of children with disabilities; therefore, they use evidence-based practice to teach and evaluate them properly and design individualized education plans [39-42].

Teachers' concern of inclusive education

It has been found that the attitude of ordinary primary school teachers towards children with special education needs entering their own schools or classes

was not very positive; while under the condition of teachers and equipment being well-prepared, teachers showed significant increase support of acceptance attitude. They were more willing to admit children with disabilities into their schools if given appropriate support. The quality of inclusive education rely on a positive attitude, supportive policies and management, school reform based on evidence-based practice, flexible curriculum and teaching, community participation, teacher reflection, necessary teacher training and resources, which means it needs a support system for inclusive education [43]. The support system for inclusive education has not been fully established, which gives too much pressure to general teachers to implement inclusive education [44].

The construction of the team of inclusive teachers is the most urgent task to promote inclusive education in China. There are consistent concerns that teachers lack the expertise and skills of inclusive education, thus, meaning they are unable to teach general students and students with disabilities in the same classes. The general teachers have little opportunity to receive inclusive education professional training, who have an extreme lack of professional knowledge leading to the fear of difficulties in the treatment of children with disabilities. In the future training arrangement, relevant education departments should consider the needs of inclusive education expertise of ordinary primary school teachers. The curricula of inclusive education should be set as a necessary course in normal education.

Equipment is the second important factor concerned by general teachers. Specifically, the majority of ordinary primary school teachers believe that their schools lack inclusive education facilities, including equipment of physical therapy, speech therapy, occupational therapy, and so on. To support the equipment for inclusive education, the government needs to set up a special fund for equipment input for students with disabilities.

Moreover, parents' attitude is another important concern. The concrete manifestation is that most ordinary primary school teachers think that the parents of general children will object and refuse children with disabilities to study together with their children. There are some cases in China that the general students' parents join together to demand the principals and even local education bureau to reject students with autism to study in general schools [45,46]. The good public opinion atmosphere is the key factor to promote inclusive education moving forward. Only with respect, equality and an advocate diverse community can inclusive education be put into effect in reality.

Influencing factors of teachers' acceptance attitude to children with disabilities

It has been shown that primary school teachers of children with disabilities accept attitude is not affected

by degree of education. On the one hand, most of the participants did not graduate with a major in special education or inclusive education, which means that even though they have various educational degrees, their professional knowledge and skills may still be similar. Even if some of them have a higher educational degree, they may not have higher knowledge and understanding of children with disabilities.

Secondly, there is no significant difference in the acceptance attitude of children with disabilities between the teachers having experience of teaching children with disabilities or not. As currently, general schools lack support for inclusive education, general teachers maybe are unable to deal with problems in their daily work in teaching children with disabilities, thus, leading them not wanting children with disabilities to be enrolled in general schools.

Conclusions and Suggestions

Firstly, general teachers in Kunming lack knowledge of inclusive education and show negativity towards inclusive education. There are a few general teachers who actively learn the knowledge of inclusive education, and the majority of ordinary primary school teachers receive few training opportunities. Their knowledge of children with disabilities is basic. Most general teachers are not quite clear about the inclusive education concept. Therefore, it is necessary to provide a proper amount of inclusive education theory and skills training for general teachers, so that they can undertake the work of inclusive education for children with disabilities as soon as possible.

More importantly, more attention should be paid to strengthen the training of pre-service inclusive teachers, including professional knowledge of children with disabilities, teaching strategies, cooperation and sharing, resource utilization, exploration ability, so as to better meet the needs of inclusive education. The most important thing is to break the gap between special education and general education from the beginning of teachers' pre-service training, establish a professional community composed of colleges and universities and general primary and secondary schools, crossing the pre-service teachers' learning and practice in colleges and universities, and provide rich opportunities for their integration of theory and practice, so as to improve inclusive teachers' competence [47].

Secondly, the main concerns of general teachers for inclusive education are teachers, equipment, and parents' attitude. General teachers believe that only by solving the problems of teachers, equipment, parents' concept and teachers' concept, can they efficiently carry out inclusive education activities, so that children with special education needs can develop well in general schools. Inclusive education is not only a single or a series of behaviors, but also a philosophical idea, which

brings together diverse students, families, educators and community members to establish schools and other educational institutions on the basis of acceptance and ownership [48]. The support system for inclusive education is crucial, including administrative support, investment for inclusive education, changing the idea of parents through home-school cooperation, community support and so on.

Combined with the status of inclusive education in China, we should accelerate the construction of resource classrooms, and establish the guidance mode of resource teachers [49,50]. Under the professional support and guidance of provincial inclusive education resource centers, the itinerant guidance mode of resource teachers should be further improved; that is, inclusive education experts and teachers should visit schools regularly to carry out case study, screening and evaluation, and training and guidance in order to assist inclusive schools to timely solve various problems in practice.

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