The Reflection of Current Situation of Inclusive Education in China

Yuan-tao HUANG and Mei ZHANG*

School of East Asian Studies, University of Sheffield, United Kingdom

*Corresponding author

Keywords: Inclusive education, China, Comparison.

Abstract. This paper mainly summarised the recent years research on inclusive education in general to evaluate its development based on a broad perspective of it, especially in China. According to review literature and conduct interviews with professor Tony Booth and a Chinese professor, this study has compared the Chinese inclusive education with the UK to explore the changes of Chinese research on this field.

Introduction

Since 1994, inclusive education has become to one of the popular topics in educational academia and developed gradually in many Western countries like the UK and USA. The argument about inclusive education has never stopped since it has emerged. In the extensive discussions, what inclusion means in education become to a fundamental question, which was naturally related to the disabled group by teachers, parents and adherents because of the influence of 'integration' and 'mainstreaming' potentially [1]. It seems not to be suitable to interpret inclusive education because a single group cannot represent all types of exclusion in education. Although many scholars, such as Ainscow, Booth, Dyson and Messiou, and even the UNESCO advocate that inclusive education is a dynamic process of covering all learners, a narrow perspective related to disability affects many studies on inclusive education continually.

According to Messiou’s research in 2017, from 2005 to 2015, about forty per cent publications in the international journal of inclusive education, an only peer-review journal with inclusive education in the title, related to special education, special educational needs and disability [2]. Oppositely, only eight per cent research in that journal was established on the broad view of inclusive education and diversity in education (ibid).

The situation of research on inclusive education in China is similar. With the more relevant research emerged, inclusive education also attracted Chinese scholars' attention, and they began to learn the successful experience from Western countries. During the period of learning experience from developed countries, China has combined local characteristics with the perspective of inclusive education to put it into practice, called 'Learning in the regular classroom' (LRC). It is
translated from the Chinese 'Sui ban jiu du,' which provides education to children with disabilities in mainstream schools [3][4]. However, during the decades of discussion, more and more researchers have recognised that inclusive education should be understood broadly, which is far more than disabled the group. Therefore, inclusive education in Chinese research is also changed with the global trend, although the narrow understanding of it is still dominated. This paper aims to explore the changes in academic research on inclusive education, particularly the Chinese studies, based on analysing previous articles. And then, according to the interviews with a Chinese professor and Professor Tony Booth, to further consider which aspects of inclusive education in China could be improved compared with the UK.

The Change in Chinese Research on Inclusive Education

The influencing factors of educational opportunities are various, such as 'patterns of employment, and wealth and attitudes towards differences' [5]. However, the Chinese traditions, Confucian philosophy, seem to provide a favourable opportunity to accept and practise inclusive value in Chinese education and even society. As in academia, Chinese researchers are also attempting to get rid of the influence of special education toward inclusive education, but it is not effective enough. There are different types of exclusive phenomena in Chinese schools now, such as labelling, bullying, the stereotype of genders, key schools, physical punishment and isolation, but when the studies concern inclusive education, the foci may always be the disabled students in the mainstream classroom. Therefore, initially, 'Learning in the regular classroom' model becomes one of the most popular research orientations of Chinese inclusive education study.

Similar to Messiou’s research in 2017, Chinese researchers also evaluated about ten-years’ studies on inclusive education and summarised several typical themes, including introducing the definition, discussing the applicability, LRC model, evaluating Western development, and considering teachers’ training [6][7]. Although it seems that the last three topics are close to the practical level, the specific concerns, particularly the LRC model, are still staying in the theoretical layer [8]. Indeed, 'Learning in the regular classroom' has relatively relationship with inclusive education research in China. Although LRC was not established for inclusive education at the beginning, it has developed with the global tendency for decades [9]. It has a far-reaching influence on Chinese inclusive education because the LRC model seems to be an essential concern of Chinese research on inclusive education, which closely relates to special education or disability study. According to the chronological orders, the LRC established in the 1980s that is earlier than inclusive education emerged in China. Thus, it is understandable that many Chinese researchers naturally links them together and even use LRC equally with inclusive education in their articles. If the understanding of inclusive education within considering special group is the narrow perspective, using LRC as inclusive education is narrower than that.

Although many Chinese researchers still are wild about exploring learning in the regular classroom profoundly and widely, it may have some changes that would benefit the development of inclusive education. First of all, several Chinese experts begin to consider how to localise the inclusive education through combing Chinese conditions [10][11]. It would be an excellent idea of improving inclusive education because the existing definitions, defined by UNESCO or Western scholars, largely depend on the Western value that is different from other regions. Of course, the period of localisation would be a reasonably long time, and so far, it is likely to remain in the consideration or demonstration. Chinese research on inclusive education is developing gradually, but most progress is emerging at the theoretical level. In practice, a Chinese professor claims that inclusive education is more like a slogan in China, and the real development is happening in special education. Although in professor Booth’s mind, the narrow understanding of inclusive education is also dominated in the UK, in practice, they have established a strong network, including schools, community, university and local authorities to support inclusive education. Hence, compared with the UK and some developed countries, research on inclusive education in China has enormous room for growth of inclusive education, especially on the practical level.
Conclusion

Inclusive education still has a close relationship between special education, although most researchers have already accepted the broad view of it at least on the theoretical level. Chinese studies on this field spend more attention to the status of LRC model and in-service teachers’ attitudes toward it. How the students and their parents treat inclusive education or LRC is unusual in Chinese articles, but it is also vital because their viewpoints are directly from their feelings of involving into inclusive education or LRC. In addition, most research on teachers’ training toward inclusive education typically links to the in-service teachers, and only a few articles mention the pre-service teachers' training in the university or concern the policymakers' influence. Above all, it can be confirmed that the research on inclusive education in China has changed, but its boundedness is also noticeable, which still needs a long period to achieve an insight of inclusive education.

Reference


