



A Comparison Study of Education for the Disabled Between China and the UK

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Abstract. Different countries have different education systems for students with disabilities. This essay focuses on the comparison of education for disabled students between China and the UK, including literary education, higher education, and adult education. It is well-established that the difficulties of education for the disabled in the two nations, and based on the local needs and consequences, several suggestions are proposed, respectively. This essay analyzed the related studies, interviews, and survey reports to explore the characteristics and kinds of problems in each country. The two disability education models, special education and inclusive education have different important concepts in the UK and China, so they need to be explained and analyzed separately. In China, the public starts to accept the group disabled, and compared with it, the UK's government have set up a completed series of policy for disabled students, but it still exists issues practicing the policy. China and the UK have different preferences in disability education, with the UK preferring inclusive education due to human rights considerations and the widespread adoption of the definition of a social model. However, China prefers special education because of its exam-oriented education model and collectivist ideology.

Keywords: Disabilities education · China · UK

1 Introduction

With the popularization of the concept of education for all, education has become one of the human rights. Different countries have set up relevant policies to guarantee the enrollment rate. For example, the nine-year compulsory education in China guarantees the right of teenagers to education according to law. However, as a minority group, the education of people with disabilities is often ignored by the public. The purpose of this essay is to give readers a clear understanding of the education model and the current situation of the disabled by comparing disability education in China and the UK. This article chooses this topic because there is still a lack of comparative studies on disability education between China and the UK, most of which are limited to one country and lack of

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comparison. It must be acknowledged that there is a small amount of literature comparing certain aspects of disability education. Although some research provided analyses of the differences between China and the West in the field of inclusive education, there is little literature on a comprehensive analysis of both special and inclusive education in China and the UK. Given that China and the UK are different in ideology, economy and culture, both of them are co-existing in special education and inclusive education, and are willing to promote inclusive education. Therefore, this article may have certain reference value for scholars studying disability education in China and the UK. All the data involved in this article will be the latest data from the past two years so that readers can have a clearer understanding of the current situation between the two countries.

2 Two Types of Education for the Disabled

There are two main education models for disability education, namely special education and inclusive education. This section of the paper will then elaborate and analyze the definitions of special education and inclusive education in China and the UK separately. It is clear that despite the conceptual differences between special education and inclusive education, both education models have had an important and far-reaching impact on the disability education system.

2.1 The Concept of Special Education in China and the UK

To start with, in the UK, special education is defined as the education where people with special educational needs can use general or especially, educationally designed curricula, materials, teaching methods, forms of teaching organization and teaching equipment designed to achieve their general and special educational goals. After the 20th century, special education in the UK developed considerably, especially in the latter part of the Second World War. In the very beginning, The Education Act of 1944, which was enacted by the British government, refined the types of special schools and had a significant impact on special education. In addition, the Warnock Report (1978), an act on the education of disabled people, was the first comprehensive discussion of special education in the UK, which has revised and embellished the scope of special education. The Act uses the term “children with special needs” instead of “children with disabilities” in the definition of the target group [1]. In terms of placement, it was proposed that the traditional fixed placement should be changed so that children with special needs could receive special education at certain times, what’s more, integrated educational placements should be facilitated and special education resource centres should be set up in ordinary schools in order to needs of special students.

On the other hand, the concept of special education in China means that it is a kind of education that uses general or special teaching methods and means based on the physical and mental characteristics and educational needs of special children, in order to maximise the potential of the educated, so that they can increase their knowledge, acquire skills, develop good moral character and enhance their adaptabilities [2]. Moreover, in addition, the target group of special education can be divided into three categories of special children. The first category is children with disabilities, including sensory disabilities

such as blindness and deafness, intellectual disabilities, physical disabilities, illnesses and many different types and degrees of disabilities; the second category is children with problems, including different types of problems such as learning problems, behavioural problems and emotional problems; and the third category is children with exceptional abilities, including gifted children with exceptional intelligence, abilities and giftedness. After the founding of New China, the Chinese State Council promulgated the Regulations on Reforming the School System in 1951, in which the document for the first time called for the establishment of special schools for the deaf, dumb and blind. Moreover, after the reform and opening up, special education in China has developed from a single type and channel to multiple types and diversity. With the promulgation of the Regulations on Education for the Disabled in 1994, and on the basis of the continued development of special schools, China also began to set up special classes attached to ordinary schools, to enroll children with disabilities in ordinary classes, and to offer various types of short- and medium-term vocational training courses, ordinary secondary schools and technical schools to enrol students with disabilities.

2.2 The Concept of Inclusive Education in China and the UK

In 1994, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization adopted the Salamanca Declaration, in which the concept of inclusive education was first mentioned. Inclusive education was developed in response to the inequalities and segregation that exist in all types of education in society. As a new educational concept and process, inclusive education is education without exclusion, discrimination or categorization, which forms an educational mindset that includes all students, rejects discrimination and exclusion, promotes extreme participation, and focuses on collective cooperation and meets different needs. And in 2005, inclusive education was further defined in the “Guidelines for Inclusive Education by UNESCO, “It is a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures and communities, and reducing exclusion from education and from within education” [3]. This type of education focuses on the assumption of putting every learner in the same classroom as well as the same schools. The UK is one of the countries that implemented inclusive education earlier and developed faster. In the 1960s, when the civil rights movement was underway and segregated education policies were being opposed, inclusive education was already in its infancy at this time. Then, in the late 1970s, the UK began to implement ‘integrated’ education, that is, breaking the segregation of special education and integrating students from special schools into mainstream schools. After decades of hard work, inclusive education in the UK has been very fruitful. In addition, there are authorities in the UK who have defined inclusive education in a way that is more in line with the needs of the country’s educational characteristics. The most authoritative is the Centre for Research on Inclusive Education (CRIE), which proposes that in inclusive education, students with disabilities and normal students should learn together in ordinary schools at all levels, and that all students should develop the ability to participate and be included in society [4].

By comparison, China has further interpreted and enriched the concept on the basis of the foreign literature on inclusive education. Among the Chinese scholars who have studied inclusive education, the most widely accepted idea comes from the scholar

Huang Zhicheng. He emphasises that inclusive education is an ongoing educational process that embraces all students, rejects discrimination and exclusion, promotes active participation, focuses on collective cooperation and meets different needs [4]. Also, in many theoretical studies of China, there is a general tendency towards the view that inclusive education promotes the inclusion of all students in society and schools, meets their individual needs, and ensures that people with special needs can receive support and help in all aspects. As far as higher education for the deaf in China is concerned, it is manifested in that deaf college students and hearing college students jointly use various resources on campus to choose and study their favorite majors [5]. In general, compared to the literature on inclusive education abroad, research on inclusive education in China, especially on higher inclusive education for the disabled, has been limited to the theoretical level for decades and has hardly reached the practical level. At present, as a complete theoretical system of inclusive education has not yet been developed in China, most of the literature on inclusive education in China is based on the introduction and analysis of the practical experiences of inclusive education in foreign countries and their implications for Chinese education, and most of the Chinese literature only focuses on the study of inclusive education in foreign primary education whilst ignoring the practical studies of inclusive education in higher education such as foreign universities. Therefore, Chinese academic research should find more solutions to address the gaps and shortcomings in this schooling area. It is necessary to continue to improve the inclusive education system on the basis of learning from foreign theories, and finally form a complete theoretical concept of inclusive education that is in line with the national conditions of the country and has unique Chinese characteristics.

3 Different Views on Students with Disabilities

This section will analyse the current situation of disabled students in China and the UK, respectively. Mainly from three perspectives, self-expectations, school expectations, and the public perceptions.

3.1 Self-expectations of Students with Disabilities

Before the government and society help to expand opportunities for getting education for students with disabilities, it is necessary to find out their self-expectation. In Xizang, China, there is a grade five girl who has a congenital absence of the left forearm [6]. Surprisingly, she is optimistic and hard-working, she can even do better than common students. She wants to be a doctor in the future and hopes to get a flexible left hand by improving technology. She studies in a normal school, and she faces malicious ridicule unavoidably, but she transfers her negative emotion to energy and never gives up. In July of the same year, a Traditional Chinese Medicine disabled was interviewed on the stage, she reminded when she was a student [7]. She also studied in a normal school, the teachers advised her family that it was impossible for her to study in the school with her serious disabled level, but her family persisted in order to give her a common experience as a usual student. With her self-effort and classmates' help, this madam completed higher education and realized her dream: to be a qualified Traditional Chinese Medicine.

According to these two cases, the self-expectations of students with disabilities in China show their reflection, that they want to get a job through learning knowledge.

Students in the UK are impacted by their disabilities as well. As a university student readme, the difficulties and her experience on the campus [8]. Martinez shows that she has to be a full-time student to get financial aid, and because it is still not enough for her, she works at least 24 h per week for her rent. However, she was told to have less work and study time, because she has chronic myofascial pain syndrome, and others can do more than her. Although these words are 'boon' and 'considerate', they cannot cover their stereotype of the disabled. This is offensive to Martinez; she hopes to be treated like an able-bodied person.

3.2 School Expectations of Disabled Students

In this situation, students with disabilities strongly hope to get a quality education like common students, and the school support is significant. Take one of the most professional special schools in Shenzhen, China for example, on August 31, 2020, the principal Yan Cao was invited by an official program, that is hosted by Shenzhen Municipal Commission for Discipline Inspection and Municipal Supervision Bureau, to share the objective and plans of school to the public [9]. The school educates students in three steps, including compulsory and higher education, rehabilitation, and employment training, to give a foundation for students with disabilities to participate in social life. Before students enroll, the school will evaluate each student and classifies them into various classes based on their ages, types of disability, and disability levels, in this way, each student is able to get the most suitable treatment. For those students who have severe disabilities, that they have to lay in the bed, the school has set up a special education system, that which teachers will come to their homes regularly, and they can have the right to be educated. Besides, family education is also important, especially for students with disabilities. The school communicates with students' families and gives target and professional suggestions.

Compared to the situation in China, the system for disabled students in the UK is more improved. As the official UK Study Organization states [10], there will be no difference between usual students and students with disabilities when they study in the UK, which is a guarantee that China cannot give. The organization lists a series of requirements for the colleges, for example, 1) colleges cannot discriminate against disabled students; 2) each college should have one office and a person in charge of special students' issues; 3) give flexible adjustments for special students. The regulations include but are not limited to these three main regulations. In this way, the rights and health of students can be guaranteed to the greatest extent.

In conclusion, although the education system for disabled students in China is not as complete as the UK's, and UK's system still needs a better implementation, the purpose of schools is that hope students can be independent and be respected by others, work and smile for themselves and realize values of themselves.

3.3 Public Perceptions of Disabled Students

This year's Paralympic Games in China showed the public sensibility. Paralympic Education is an important component of the Paralympic Games. For achieving the goal of giving the public a positive impact and encouraging them, Nanjing Disabled Persons' Federation updated an article on the official website, called Paralympic Education Changes People's Minds [11]. The article summarized the main activities of Paralympic Education, such as sending a book that talks about the value of education of Paralympics and carrying out a series of activities about the Paralympic Games. These activities have attracted a large part of the public, especially teenagers, and with the culture of the Paralympic Games gradually integrate into public life, it promotes the development of an inclusive and friendly society. For another aspect, during the Paralympic Games, there were more than 9,000 volunteers, which shows the importance of this activity to the public [12]. As a reporter for China Women's News, most of the volunteers Yang interviewed showed that they were proud to be volunteers in the Paralympic Games. Once they received appreciation from players, or whoever needed help, they felt they are valuable. At the same time, when they saw how hard the players did exercises every day, and overcame unimaginable pain and difficulty, they realized the real meaning of life: people should be passionate, confident, and never give up. One of the volunteers stated that this experience would be her precious memory, it keeps giving her the courage to face difficulties in the future.

In the UK, although the education system is more consummate, it is hard to practice. Professor Anne Shaw analysed the policies and progress of education for disabled students in the past 50 years [13]. As mentioned before, the government has great policies and takes an inclusive education model, but there are many obstacles, including the stereotypes of people with disabilities and the public's attitude. The tense relationship between ideas and reality makes social inequities still exist. Another key point to remember is that disabled higher education students remain at a high risk to drop out of college, despite the inclusive education which is promised by the government at this time. During this progress, link this study to the first subsection, with the experience of Martinez [8], the 'kindnesses' from the public make disabled students who want to be independent feel frustrated.

All in all, in China, through the Paralympic Games, society starts to accept disabilities as a part of the public. By comparison, the UK government has more improvement policies and the public institutions are more applicable to assure disabled students are respected, and the national concept has been basically established. However, it is still difficult to implement the policy. Students with disabilities are still discriminated against by social subconsciousness.

4 The Difference in Disability Education Between China and the UK

Nowadays, in the field of education for the disabled, inclusive education is gradually dominating. Although special education can still be seen everywhere, its criticism and the praise for inclusive education have become increasingly obvious. The choice of

disability education model between China and the UK is different. Although there are no clear researches on which education model is more prevalent in the two countries, preferences can still be discerned through data and literature in recent years. At a press conference in September 2021, China's Ministry of Education said that the number of special education students in China has reached 880,000, and further investment will be made to increase the number of special education schools as well as train more teachers to improve the quality of special education [14]. From this report, it is obvious that China still prefers special education, and has decided to continue to expand the scale in the future, as there are several mentions in the report to continue to strengthen special education teachers and increase the number of students. Although the Ministry of Education has also pledged to promote inclusive education, the word used in the report is learning in regular classes. This is not the same as inclusion education, which requires disabled students not only to attend mainstream schools but also to be assisted with their special needs. However, the learning in regular classes in China does not take into account disabled students' individual abilities and whether they need extra help to achieve learning goals. Learning in regular classes is simply given the opportunity for the disabled to receive mainstream education [15]. Therefore, it can only be regarded as the embryonic form of inclusive education, and its promotion does not mean that China is gradually moving towards inclusive education. In the UK, though special schools still exist, they are moving closer to inclusive education. British education policy has supported the admission of pupils with special needs into mainstream schools for the past two decades [16]. However, how did the preference between the two modes of disability education come about in China and the UK? This will be discussed in the next two parts.

4.1 The Preference for Inclusive Education in the UK

After the Education for All Handicapped Children Act was proposed in 1975, inclusive Education began to enter the public view and was further clarified in the Disability Education Act. The right of disabled people to inclusive education is also enshrined in the 2006 Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. It could be argued that these acts promoted inclusive education in the UK, with the ultimate ideal that all students could attend mainstream schools. The reasons why Britain supports inclusive education can be divided into three aspects. First, inclusive education means reducing isolation and discrimination. In inclusive education, all students can be treated equally, and their physical defects are no longer the cause of learning difficulties, but the real difficulties are caused by the social relationship between learners and teachers and the exclusive education model [17]. This view also fits with the prevailing social model of disability in the UK, which claim that disability is not an individual problem but a social obstacle. The second reason is human rights. Education is a kind of human right. With the promotion of civil rights and self-advocacy, the idea that students with disabilities have the same right to attend mainstream schools has been strengthened [17]. This not only gives disabled students an equal opportunity but also provides a valued and inclusive social experience for all students [18]. The third can be called integration. On the one hand, inclusive education prevents disabled students from being isolated and thus losing the opportunity to form relationships with their peers, which may lead to segregated

adult life in the future. On the other hand, inclusive education can also prepare students in advance to live in a diverse society and reduce the misunderstanding of the disabled. Classifying students according to whether they have disabilities or not builds concepts of normal and abnormal, further leading to the pursuance of normality. The separation of normal and special is the norm of the medical model, which is opposite to the social model admired in the UK.

4.2 The Preference for Special Education in China

At present, China has long been in a state of special education as the main, supplemented by learning in regular classes. Although some disabled students can get extra help, there is a lack of a unified system in this area, so inclusive education in China is not perfect. One explanation for why China chose special education is because of its different social ideology. China has a long history of collectivism, and individualism is thought to be eliminated [17]. This has led to a society in which the big picture is taken into account rather than the needs of everyone. Deng and Poon-McBrayer's (2004) point of view is more direct. They argued that inclusive education is essentially a Western point of view. Although China accepts the views of inclusive and mainstreaming, its choice to expand special education is based on China's own economy and culture, and the implementation of inclusive education is an ideal goal in the future. However, the author believes that the biggest problem is not China's ideology or economic culture, but the selective nature of Chinese education. China adopts exam-oriented education, and the ultimate goal of students' study is to enter higher education through the college entrance examination. When exams become the sole criterion for evaluating students, it means that all students are exposed to the same curriculum and teaching methods, and special needs are ignored, making it difficult for students with disabilities to enter universities in the fierce competition [19]. This problem is also reflected in a previous report by the Ministry of Education [14]. With about 880,000 disabled students, only 10,000 of them enrolled in universities each year, the probability is 1.1%.

5 Conclusion

This study has analysed the education system in China and the UK respectively. In order to have a better discussion and found target suggestions, the benefits, and limitations of special education and inclusive education were stated. In detail, the three expectations from different perspectives explored the current situations in the two nations, they are the self-expectation of students with disabilities, school expectations, and the public recognition. It has explained and explored the preference patterns for disability education in China and the UK. In the UK, inclusive education has been distributed and the government advocated that disabled students' study in the common schools. In comparison, special education dominant in China. Based on the different cultures and social ideologies, the two nations have built up their particular education approaches, and realise inclusion and integration. Through analysing and discussing, this essay has compared the education for students with disabilities and explored several issues, which helps to recognize the current situation of disabled education in the two nations. Further research will focus on the problems and solutions to promote or solve the issues.

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