

# A Review of Research Related to Pre-service Teachers' Attitudes Toward Inclusive Education in China

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## Abstract

Pre-service teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education are the key to the success of inclusive education and an essential factor in improving the quality of inclusive education. In order to understand the current status of research on pre-service teachers' attitudes toward integrated education in China, the literature analysis method was used to sort out the relevant studies on pre-service teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education in China. Through the results of the literature review, it was found that pre-service teachers' attitudes toward integrated education were generally positive, some teachers had negative attitudes, and some teachers rejected special education students. Factors that influence teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education include the type of student disorder, teachers' knowledge, and experience with children with special needs, among others. The current research suffers from a wide range and lack of depth of research, lack of uniformity, and few actionable responses. Future research suggests that it should be explored by expanding the group of research subjects, strengthening the combination of qualitative and quantitative aspects, enhancing the depth of research, and digging into the essence behind the phenomenon.

**Keywords:** Pre-Service Teachers, Inclusive Education, Attitudes

## Introduction

In the 1950s, the "normalization movement" of special education began to emerge in Europe, which called for reforming the original segregated and closed special education and placing children with special needs in a normal social environment so that they could adapt to social life. This inclusive education-oriented approach to promote the reform of equitable and quality education has permeated some of China's major education policies in recent years. In 2022, China's Ministry of Education and seven other departments jointly issued the "14th Five-Year Plan of Action for the Development and Enhancement of Special Education", proposing the basic principle of "insisting on respecting differences and diversified

integration, so that children and youth with disabilities and ordinary children and adolescents can understand and respect each other and grow and progress together in an integrated environment". The work of attending classes has become a characteristic form of inclusive education implementation in China (Hua, 2003; Park, 2004). However, the quality of integrated education is not high and there is a phenomenon of "return" of children with special needs (Wang et al., 2018).

### **Problem Statement**

According to Niu (2012), teachers' attitudes toward integrated education for children with disabilities is one of the key factors in the success of integrated education. High-quality teachers are the backbone of high-quality educational development, and high-quality integrated education teachers are a strong guarantee for a successful integrated education. The attitudes of integrated education possessed by accompanying teachers are not only related to teachers' educational behaviors and affect the social integration of students with disabilities, but are also essential factors for improving the quality of integrated education (Wang et al., 2018).

The attitudes toward inclusive education possessed by inclusive education teachers are not only related to teachers' educational behaviors and affect the social integration of students with disabilities, but are also essential for improving the quality of inclusive education (Wang et al., 2018). Inclusive education knowledge, skills and attitudes are qualities necessary for teachers to be successful in teaching inclusive education (Feng, 2014). In efforts to achieve inclusive education, teachers are the actual implementers of inclusive education and attempts have been made to understand their beliefs about the practice of inclusive education in schools. Teachers' attitudes and motivations towards the adoption of inclusive education in schools is a fundamental belief that has been under study (De Boer et al., 2011). Research has shown that teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education are a key factor in the quality of inclusive education, and that teachers with positive attitudes towards inclusive education are more attentive to individual differences and tend to use teaching strategies that promote the development of all students in their teaching (Forlin et al., 2011).

As a reserve army for the future implementation of integrated education, which is the backbone of ensuring the quality of integrated education, pre-service teachers play a pivotal importance in the process of developing, promoting, and implementing integrated education. Pre-service education, as the generation stage of formal teachers, is the beginning stage of teachers' professional competence development, and it is also the key stage of teachers' integrated education literacy formation (Zhu, 2014). The inclusive education literacy and skills developed by pre-service teacher trainees during their school years largely influence individuals' educational attitudes and behaviors toward children with special needs in educational practice, which in turn affects the starting point and spatial level of their own professional development after service (Wang, X. X., Wang, X. W., & Ren, Y. 2022). Therefore, it is of great value and significance to investigate the current situation, influencing factors, mechanisms of action and modes of enhancement of teacher educators' attitudes toward inclusive education, and to strengthen the research on the talent training model of pre-service teacher educators.

### **Research Method**

This study was conducted by literature review and document analysis to sort out the studies related to Chinese pre-service teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education. The

Chinese keywords were searched in China Knowledge Network, Google Scholar, and China Vipers database, using the keywords "pre-service teachers," "teacher trainees," "current teacher trainees," "college students," "university students," and "attitudes toward inclusive education." "college students" and "attitudes toward integrated education", "attitudes toward inclusive education", and "attitudes toward attending classes". The combined search resulted in 45 articles in Chinese.

## **Research Results**

### **Pre-service teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education**

Pre-service teachers are the main group of people who will implement inclusive education in the future, and teachers' attitudes, concerns, and perceptions of inclusive education not only affect the understanding and accepting attitudes of ordinary students and parents toward children with special needs, but also affect the success of inclusive education practices (Lim et al., 2014). Therefore, pre-service teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education have become the focus of many researchers' attention.

The literature study revealed that the results of the research on attitudes toward integrated education were inconsistent, and overall most pre-service teachers had positive attitudes toward integrated education, but some pre-service teachers had neutral and rejecting attitudes toward integrated education. Wang and Zhao (2019) used a questionnaire method to survey the students in their freshman, sophomore and junior years of preschool major. It was found that in general, preschool teacher trainees had positive and optimistic attitudes toward the placement of special children in classes, but they lacked the professional knowledge and skills to engage in integrated education; they preferred special education classes in regular schools in terms of the placement of special children. Liu (2019) concluded that pre-service special education teachers had positive receptive attitudes toward inclusive education and pre-service general education teachers had neutral attitudes toward inclusive education; pre-service special education teachers had more positive attitudes toward inclusive education than pre-service general education teachers. There were significant differences between pre-service special education teachers' and pre-service general education teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education on the positive affect, training and competency, negative affect dimensions, and total scale scores. Yang and Lu (2021) investigated the attitudes of 180 preschool teachers towards preschool integrated education through a self-administered questionnaire and found that preschool teachers had an overall positive attitude towards preschool integrated education, and preschool teachers were generally willing to accept children with special needs into the activity room, but lacked the knowledge and confidence to practice integrated education, which was similar to the findings of (Peng, 2010; Yada and Savolainen, 2017). They were highly accepting of children with special needs such as autism and learning disabilities; they were slightly less accepting of children with emotional and behavioral disorders and multiple disabilities. The results of Gu (2021) showed that undergraduate teacher educators had an overall positive attitude toward inclusive education.

However, most scholars have suggested that there are neutral or even negative concepts and attitudes of integrated education among pre-service teachers and school students in recent years. Chen and Chen (2017) used a self-administered questionnaire to investigate the cognitive attitudes of 320 preschool undergraduates toward attending classes with children, and found that preschool undergraduates were basically neutral toward attending classes with children, and their overall cognitive attitudes toward attending classes with children were

slightly negative; they were more optimistic about the acceptance of children with special needs, but their basic literacy to engage in attending classes with children was relatively lacking. Xie (2018) conducted a survey and analysis of the attitudes toward inclusive education on 800 current teacher education students at a general school in Shandong Province, China, and found that the attitudes of general teacher education students toward inclusive education are negative, inclusive education makes general teacher education students feel some pressure, but they do not reject inclusive education, and general teacher education students hope to get enough social support in the process of promoting inclusive education. Liu (2019) used 566 pre-service teachers as the study population and found that pre-service teachers had neutral attitudes towards inclusive education. Yang and Jia (2019) This study used a questionnaire survey method, supplemented by an interview method, to explore the attitudes of 234 primary education teacher-training students at Hangzhou Normal University toward integrated education for children with disabilities. The results showed that the primary education teaching students had an overall neutral attitude toward integrated education for children with disabilities. The pre-service special education teachers had a positive attitude toward inclusive education, and the pre-service general education teachers had a neutral attitude toward inclusive education. Pre-service special education teachers had more positive attitudes toward inclusive education than pre-service general education teachers. He (2022) surveyed 790 pre-service teachers on their extrapolated attitudes toward children with autism and showed that pre-service teachers held moderate extrapolated attitudes toward children with autism and showed negative implicit attitudes toward children with autism.

### **Factors influencing pre-service teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education**

A growing number of literatures indicate that attitudes toward inclusive education are related to a variety of factors. Among them, the presence or absence of a professional background in special education, teaching experience, type of children with special needs, respondents' gender, age, frequency of professional contact with people with disabilities, type of students' impairment and knowledge of inclusive education become important factors influencing attitudes toward inclusive education (Gao, 2019; Feng et al., 2015; Shi & Chen, 2017). In conclusion, there are three categories of factors that influence attitudes toward inclusive education, respectively, background, educational target characteristics, and personal characteristics. Regarding context, previous studies have shown that culture, historical background, and national education policies influence attitudes toward inclusive education (Savolainen et al., 2012). Regarding the characteristics of the educational target, the type of disability of the child seems to be important, as individuals with cognitive impairment or autism spectrum disorder are considered more difficult to be included in mainstream education than individuals with motor disorders (Jury et al., 2021). Li et al (2019) in a study of 632 primary and secondary school teachers in Luo hu District, Shenzhen, China, showed that teachers had more positive attitudes toward students with lower levels of impairment.

Some of pre-service teachers' own personal characteristics can also have an impact on attitudes toward inclusive education. For example, their gender. Qi et al (2019) found that female teachers were more supportive of inclusive education compared to male teachers, and women had more positive attitudes toward inclusive education than men, with significant differences between male and female teachers.

Professional background. According to a survey by Wan (2005), normal university students who have studied special education-related courses are significantly more positive than those who have not studied them. That is, teachers with special education background

have A significantly higher attitude towards integrated education than those without special education background (Shi & Chen, 2017; Braksiek et al., 2019), which shows that normal university students who have studied special education courses may better accept students with special needs.

Experience of contact with children with disabilities. Foreign research has found that contact between groups can enhance group relationships by reducing prejudice among people. Teachers who have more contact with children with disabilities feel more confident about practicing inclusive education and are more willing to include all types of students with special needs in their classes. According to the survey of Sun and Du (2013), whether normal university students have participated in the activities of offering love to special children is significantly related with the acceptance attitude of special children, that is, the integrated education attitude score of normal university students with contact experience with disabled people is higher than that of normal university students with no contact experience. This result was confirmed by (Zhang, 2019). Personal social-political ideology (Brandes & Crowson, 2009) or self-efficacy (i. e. teachers who have confidence in their teaching ability are more inclined to inclusive education, Desombre et al., 2019).

### **Related research on attitudes toward inclusive education**

The research related to attitudes toward inclusive education, among others, revolves around the exploration of the relationship with variables such as self-efficacy, personality traits, and motivation. It has been noted that teachers who have confidence in their teaching abilities are more inclined to inclusive education and that pre-service teachers' teaching efficacy is a strong predictor of their attitudes towards inclusive education and is the only key factor influencing teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education (Savolainen et al., 2012); Skuller, 2011; Desombre et al., 2019). Malinen et al (2012) investigated the relationship between teacher efficacy for inclusive education and attitudes towards inclusive education in Beijing, China, using 451 pre-service teachers as subjects, and the results showed a positive relationship between teacher efficacy for inclusive education and attitudes towards inclusive education. Qu (2020) found a significant positive relationship between pre-service teachers' self-efficacy for inclusive education and their attitudes toward inclusive education through a self-administered self-efficacy questionnaire for pre-service teachers at three universities in Jinan, Baoding, and Lanzhou, China. The pre-service teachers' sense of efficacy for inclusive education had a positive predictive effect on attitude toward inclusive education. Chen et al (2020) surveyed 672 kindergarten teacher students in four regions of China: Sichuan, Shaanxi, Hebei, and Anhui, and found that there were significant positive correlations between kindergarten teacher students' personality of initiative, sense of efficacy for inclusive education, and attitudes toward inclusive education, and that kindergarten teacher students' sense of efficacy for inclusive education and attitudes toward inclusive education played multiple mediating roles between personality of initiative and apprehension about inclusive education. The results of a questionnaire survey conducted by Lu et al (2021) among 637 kindergarten teachers in four provinces (municipalities directly under the central government) in China showed that kindergarten teachers' perceptions of organizational support, competency, efficacy in inclusive education, and attitudes toward inclusive education were significantly and positively correlated; kindergarten teachers' competency and efficacy in inclusive education mediated the chain between organizational support and attitudes toward inclusive education. Zhong (2021) found that general teachers' attitudes toward integrated education, social support and sense of efficacy for integrated education were related in two



ways; general teachers' sense of efficacy for integrated education mediated the effect of social support on attitudes toward integrated education. Wang, Song, Ma, X., Ma, Me., and Wang T.Z. (2023) found that integrated education self-efficacy played a partially mediating role in the relationship between social support and attitudes toward integrated education. This is consistent with the findings of foreign studies by (Vogiatzi et al., 2021; Opoku et al., 2021).

### **Research Evaluation and Recommendations**

Through a review of the literature on attitudes toward integrated education in China, current attitudinal research on integrated education in mainland China has received attention, covering almost all perspectives of support for work with classroom students. Chinese scholars' research on attitudes toward integrated education is intertwined longitudinally and cross-sectionally. The cross-section revolves around general teachers, integrated education teachers, and special school teachers, and the longitudinal direction runs through the entire teaching school period (Gao, 2019). However, in previous studies, the researchers have been more concerned with the attitudes of in-service teachers toward inclusive education, neglecting the research on the attitudes of pre-service teachers and current normal university students. toward inclusive education.

Although some studies have presented the results of pre-service teachers' attitudes toward integrated education, the findings are more general. There is no separate account of other normal university students in China, and the statements are more biased toward students in preschool education, elementary education, and special education, and less about the specific integration education attitude outcomes of other types normal university students in China (e.g., language majors, mathematics majors, chemistry, physics, English, biology, geography, etc.), and there is a lack of cross-sectional comparative studies between Normal and non-normal teacher majors pre-service teachers .

Secondly, there are more quantitative methods and less qualitative methods used in the current research. The research on attitudes toward integrated education is still at the stage of status quo survey, and the research is conducted by a single method such as questionnaire, and the survey sample is small, and the questionnaires used are mostly prepared by researchers based on personal experience, and the structure and items of the questionnaires are not strictly standardized. lacks universality and generalizability, and has limited guidance at the policy level (Zhang et al., 2017). How to revise and cite high-quality foreign questionnaires is also an issue that future researchers need to focus on. Researchers in China can draw on the theoretical basis of the dimensional constructs of foreign inclusive education scales, revise the foreign scales through the method of factor analysis, and develop scales or questionnaires that are applicable to inclusive education practice in China to provide reliable research tools for conducting inclusive education attitude research. The future trend of research on attitudes toward inclusive education is qualitative combined research, but previous research in this area is rare and needs to be strengthened.

Finally, research on attitudes toward inclusive education should not only focus on the present moment, but should extend the posttest (Chen, & Lee, 2019). Many studies have focused only on teachers' attitudes (Butakor et al., 2018; Vanderpuye et al., 2018). Clearly, focusing on teachers' attitudes may not provide a broad understanding of the factors that influence integration practices. A study of an issue that focuses only on surface phenomena without digging into its causes and trends is not thorough enough, and the results of the study are not effective in providing ideas for future research and drawing on them for the development of future practice, and the study loses its original meaning.

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