

EARLY CHILDHOOD INCLUSION: A SURVEY OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS'
OPINIONS ON THE KIND AND AMOUNTS OF ASSISTANCE NEED TO COMPLETELY
INCLUDE CHILDREN IN SPECIAL NEEDS

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the views of preschool educators on the kinds and levels of support necessary to effectively integrate children with special needs into regular educational settings. A total of 1,608 educators responded to a survey that was devised to allow for the gathering of demographic information and perceived help needs using a structured questionnaire and a 5-point Likert scale. Quantitative data was analyzed in SPSS version 25 using descriptive statistics and ANOVA to investigate the quantitative and qualitative relationship between the assistance needs and outcomes of early childhood inclusion. There was a clear consensus amongst educators concerning being highly influential on the critical importance of additional preparation, resources, and staffing for successful inclusive practice. Actually, the educators believed that insufficient support often restricted their ability to cater to the needs of various children as most of them have unique requirements. The study aimed to uncover if there was a statistical relation between the extent to which educators perceived the levels of support and their abilities to create inclusive environments. The p-value established for the study was less than 0.05, which was justifiable for the statistical significance meant. These findings signify the necessity of the need for educators' support as part of the most imperative elements in initiating and promoting successful inclusion within early childhood education. The study contributes further to existing literature by giving much insight into the kinds of support needed by educators to implement inclusion so that children with special needs can be fully included in learning processes. This paper makes recommendations to the policymakers and educational settings around professional development and resource reallocation that was led to equal and effective learning experiences for all children in these settings.

Keywords: Early childhood inclusion, Early childhood educators', Special needs, Educators' opinions, Inclusive education

INTRODUCTION

Educators' perspectives on inclusive education among Chinese preschoolers are explored in this research. A well-structured early childhood education program that places an emphasis on healthy relationships is the responsibility of the institution. All children in China have access to the early childhood program that their parents desire, regardless of their physical or intellectual capacity. This is why China was selected as the venue for this study. China has a strong intellectual and official foundation for inclusive education, which has helped it flourish and be more widely used. Teachers have always played a vital role in China's inclusive education system, which has been in place since the early years of the country's educational reforms. Early childhood educators work hard to ensure that all students, including those with special needs, have access to a quality education (Steed et al., 2024). Chinese parents have enjoyed a wide array of alternatives for high-quality childcare for more than a century. Families not receiving government subsidies are not limited in their capacity to choose the early development programs that work best for their children. Public and private kindergartens, community centres, playgroups, in-home care, early development centres for Pacific Islanders, and many more options are available to them, so they may pick and choose what works best for them. Licensing requirements and the China early childhood curriculum are prerequisites for early childhood education programs to be considered in accordance with the Early Childhood Education Laws of 2008 (Ministry of Education, 2017). Teachers at China's preschools, kindergartens, first grades, and other early childhood education settings have considerable sway on their students. They should provide kids with opportunities to learn, play, and unwind while also setting them up for future academic and personal success. There has to be a greater commitment to helping every kid succeed academically while they are still developing as people. In order to foster the optimal conditions for children's growth throughout their first years of schooling, it is crucial to listen to the children and consider their perspectives on education. In many cultures, children are revered as experts in fields that directly affect them and as trustworthy information sources for subjects that may improve their life. The area of early childhood education, which deals with the instruction of infants and toddlers, is now one of the most exciting parts of the teaching profession. There are three subfields within this broader area: childcare, early education, and early intervention (Paulsrud & Nilholm, 2023). The National Association for the Education of Young Children and the Division of Early development have collaborated to provide a common definition of inclusion in early development programs. On the other hand, early development programs still face barriers that prevent children with impairments from participating nationwide. Lack of adequate funding for early children's educators and the absence of a cohesive pre-service structure for training early development professionals are two of the many obstacles that researchers have identified as preventing professionals from offering high-quality inclusive early childhood education. There is a need for scholars and politicians to work together to address these interconnected challenges, such as making sure that children with disabilities, even the youngest ones, are served in the least restrictive environment and have access to programs meant for typically developing children. Topics covered in the study's literature evaluation on inclusive practices for young children include: the history of inclusive education in the US,

various definitions of inclusion in early childhood, educators' perspectives, administrative supports needed for inclusion, the importance of specialised training and education, and the impact of guiding philosophies and curriculum on inclusive practices. They also hear about the importance of specialised training and education. Finally, more study is required to resolve the difficulties encountered by early childhood educators in offering high-quality inclusive education and to guarantee that all children with disabilities are able to take part in early development programs (Lindner et al., 2023).

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Early childhood inclusion is said to be one of the most critical aspects of educational practice in which every child, irrespective of his or her abilities or disabilities, is to get an opportunity to learn meaningfully within inclusive settings. Research calls for this approach because of the ever-growing body of evidence that promotes and highlights the inclusivity of education for children with special needs compared to their typically developing peers. Inclusion fosters social and cognitive development and gives all children a sense of belonging; accordingly, it provides a strong foundation for a lifetime of learning and emotional well-being. Although inclusion is known to have benefits for children, early childhood educators are challenged to build successful inclusive practice. Variability in training, resources, and support affects the opportunity educators are able to access, which they report impacts how prepared they perceive themselves to be in making effective inclusive practice (Atas et al., 2023). Many teachers believe that they are unsure of how to modify their instruction and curricula for all the special needs of children. Often, this can be caused by a lack of professional development, understaffing, and low access to specialized resources. Opinions of educators towards the types and levels of support necessary to facilitate successful inclusion can be very diverse. Factors that influence these opinions can include personal experience with children who have a disability, institutional policies, and sources of community support. Research on educators' perspectives is essential in determining how to create effective support systems and trainings that strengthen their capacity to include all children. The article attempted to elicit the opinions of early childhood educators with respect to kinds and extent of support required in totally inclusive classrooms. A good number of needs and barriers perceived by those who implement truly inclusive environments for all children should be communicated to policymakers, training programs, and educational institutions. These findings were all lead to a more accurate interpretation of how one can best bring about inclusive practices so that early childhood education becomes an enabling environment for every child (Gordon-Gould & Hornby, 2023).

PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH

The research aims at an investigation of early childhood educators' opinions on the nature and intensity of support to children with special needs that is appropriate for inclusion in educational settings. Researchers intend to interview the educators, as well as survey them, in an effort to acquire their viewpoints on the issues they are confronted with, as well as what support they would need, for example, in form of training, resources, and staffing. Understanding these opinions, therefore, is crucial for informing policies and practices that may be able to enhance the inclusion effort for all children to grow and thrive together in educational environments. This research is intended to add valuable insights as a guide for the development of targeted professional development programs and resources for educators who must address the many diverse needs of their students.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The importance of educational equity is emphasised by the widely recognised notion of inclusive education. To ensure full participation for under-represented groups and children with impairments, nevertheless, this is insufficient. When it comes to conveying its principles to the school system, inclusive education has several unsolved issues. In an inclusive classroom, students from a variety of backgrounds and with varying levels of academic achievement work together to learn and grow. According to studies, inclusive practices can be categorised as follows: (a) when children with special needs have equal access to educational and social opportunities as their typically developing peers; (b) when their families are valued and supported; (c) when all children are treated with respect and given equal rights; and (d) when all parents are treated with the same amount of respect and given equal rights as other children in the community (Jury et al., 2023). By stressing the importance of social righteousness and justice, educators strive to foster a sense of community and belonging among their pupils and their families. The effectiveness of the inclusion policy in early childhood settings, which has been in place for some time, is still up for debate. In order to guarantee that early childhood education facilities in China provide sufficient quality education, the Education Review Office (ERO) conducts evaluations. Instead of implementing a cookie-cutter approach that caters to all students, inclusion means assuring each student that they were thrive in the classroom when they are able to learn alongside peers who may or may not have their unique characteristics. Consistency, dependability, a curriculum, principles, resources, ways of working together, and a plan for helping young children develop caring and courteous relationships with others are all part of special education for kids. Integrating children with special needs into the general student body, providing them with necessary care, and respecting them as distinct persons are all requirements of the Ministry of Education (2017). Hence, it is essential that all early childhood programs provide an inclusive education where children with special needs are not only included but also encouraged to participate in all aspects of the curriculum. Inclusion in early childhood describes the critical need to promote a supportive learning environment for children with special needs and their peers (Hornby & Kauffman, 2023). Studies show that an inclusive

environment promotes social interaction, positive developmental results, and empathy among all children. However, the success of inclusion largely relies on the preparedness and support available to educators. Studies indicate that most early childhood educators do not feel adequately prepared to meet the needs of their students and show significant variation in how they incorporate inclusion in their practice. Systemic barriers, including limited resources and staffing, also create challenges for educators to best support students. Literature to date speaks to the need to be able to understand the perspectives held by educators about what kinds and levels of support they feel are necessary to include children. In all these, bridging the gaps with adequate efforts was ensure that future training and policy initiation may be fashioned to equip the educators with the tools and knowledge to have truly inclusive classrooms where all children have equal access to quality early childhood education (Yenduri et al., 2023).

RESEARCH QUESTION

What support do educators believe is essential for inclusive early childhood education?

METHODOLOGY

RESEARCH DESIGN

Quantitative data analysis was conducted using SPSS version 25. The combination of the odds ratio and the 95% confidence interval provided information about the nature and trajectory of this statistical association. The p-value was set at less than 0.05 as the statistical significance level. The data was analysed descriptively to provide a comprehensive understanding of its core characteristics. Quantitative approaches are characterised by their dependence on computing tools for data processing and their use of mathematical, arithmetic, or statistical analyses to objectively assess replies to surveys, polls, or questionnaires.

SAMPLING

A random sampling technique was applied for the study. The research relied on questionnaires to gather its data. The Rao-soft program determined a sample size of 1548. A total of 1650 questionnaires were distributed; 1632 were returned, and 24 were excluded due to incompleteness. In the end, 1608 questionnaires were used for the research comprising 983 females and 805 men.

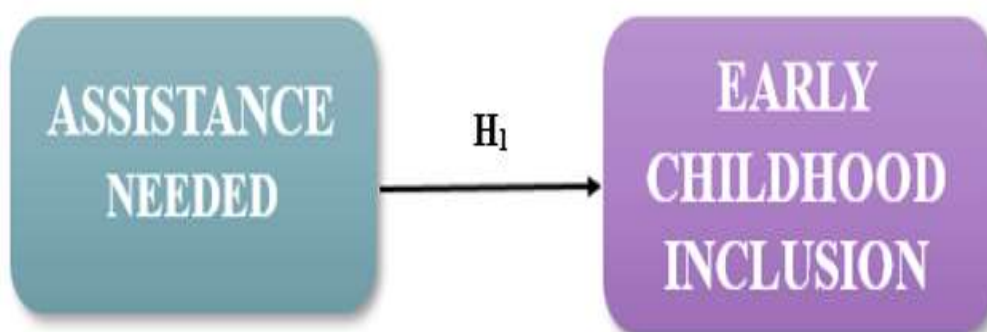
DATA AND MEASUREMENT

A questionnaire survey served as the main data collector for the study. There were two sections to the survey: (A) General demographic information and (B) Online & non-online channel factor replies on a 5-point Likert scale. Secondary data was gathered from a variety of sources, with an emphasis on online databases.

STATISTICAL TOOLS

Descriptive anaAlysis was used to grasp the fundamental character of the data. The researcher applied ANOVA for the analysis of the data.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK



RESULTS

FACTOR ANALYSIS

Factor analysis (FA) is used to validate the foundation of a measurement battery, aiming to identify latent characteristics and measurement inaccuracies. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) Test is used to determine data suitability for factor analysis, ensuring sufficient data for all model variables and the whole model. KMO values range from 0 to 1, with an adequate sample size between 0.8 and 1.0. Large-scale correlations pose a significant challenge for component analysis. Kaiser's minimum and maximum requirements range from 0.050 to 0.059.

Table 1: KMO and Bartlett's Test

| KMO and Bartlett's Test ^a | | |
|--|--------------------|----------|
| Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy. | | .932 |
| Bartlett's Test of Sphericity | Approx. Chi-Square | 6850.175 |
| | df | 190 |
| | Sig. | .000 |
| a. Based on correlations | | |

The study used the KMO test for sample adequacy, resulting in a KMO value of .932, and a significance level of 0.00, indicating the data is suitable for exploratory factor analysis.

TEST FOR HYPOTHESIS

A. DEPENDENT VARIABLE: EARLY CHILDHOOD INCLUSION

Early childhood inclusion refers to the integration of children who have special needs into early childhood education settings, because all children should have the opportunity to learn in a real way along with their peers without special needs. In appreciating diversity, this approach encourages social interaction and fosters belonging. Educational practices are modified in order to accommodate the diversity of requirements all children have (Steed et al., 2024).

B. INDEPENDENT VARIABLE: ASSISTANCE NEED

Assistance need refers to the types and degrees of support that teachers and children require for successful learning and participation in an inclusive environment. This can include supports, such as special training given to teachers; teaching aids and extra staff, and specially designed instructional strategies that can adapt to various learning needs (Schaub & Lütolf, 2024).

C. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ASSISTANCE NEED AND EARLY CHILDHOOD INCLUSION

A connection between support need and early childhood inclusion was therefore key. Provision and adequacy of support for educators largely determined whether inclusive practices could be implemented with success. Educators can best do what is in their power to provide an inclusive environment where the needs of all children in their setting are minimized, assuming proper training, resources, or staffing support. Instead, though, the lack of support may meet a barrier to the implementation of inclusion, therefore voids are left in the delivery of the educational experience of children who have special needs. It is from this perspective that understanding and response toward the requirement of assistance

becomes important for ensuring that early childhood education settings are de facto inclusive (Leijen et al., 2021).

Based on the above discussion, the researcher formulated the following hypothesis, which was to analyse the relationship between Assistance Need and Early Childhood Inclusion.

Table 2: ANOVA Test

| ANOVA | | | | | |
|-----------------------|----------------|------|-------------|----------|------|
| Sum | | | | | |
| | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
| Between Groups | 77542.590 | 863 | 7458.339 | 2246.385 | .000 |
| Within Groups | 742.843 | 744 | 7.378 | | |
| Total | 81354.478 | 1607 | | | |

In this study, the result is significant. The value of F is 2246.385, which reaches significance with a p-value of .000 (which is less than the alpha level). This means the ***“H1: There is a significant relationship between Assistance Need and Early Childhood Inclusion”*** is accepted and the null hypothesis is rejected.

DISCUSSION

This survey of early childhood educators about their perceptions of the types and degrees of support required to include children with special needs has brought forward significant insights into the state of current-inclusive practices in early childhood education. Practitioners, such as these, are important agents of inclusive environments, and much can be learned from their perceptions about the obstacles and resources necessary to support effective implementation. First, the data indicates that many teachers feel they require more training and resources in order to provide for the needs of students with special needs adequately. Indeed, this is in line with the general literature, which even suggests that professional development in the forms of lack of preparation and a surplus of incompetence was a source of obstruction towards its effectiveness. Educators indicated that strong training programs, like workshops and professional development, are essential in equipping educators to modify their instruction practices and curricula. Such competencies building among educators could lead to a more supportive and inclusive environment for all children. On another hand, the questionnaire results indicate the most prominent needs for supplementary resources, such as teaching aids and further staff support in order to assist in the provision of inclusive practice. It is emphasized that individual support in larger classes is impossible without adequate supplementary staff. Therefore, very clear organizational resource planning is called for. The embedding of higher levels of staffing or of specialist

assistant support within educational contexts was create spaces that allow children with special needs access to meaningful relationships and learning experiences. Third, the relationship between perceived support needs and positive inclusion outcomes is critical. The results show that when teachers are supported, they are most likely to carry out more effective inclusive strategies. Still, the presence of support interference does not always aid the process, and, in such a case, it becomes a hindrance and barrier in providing an education to children with special needs. This relationship further strengthens the point that there is great need for understanding and being able to eradicate problems the educator faces in inclusive settings because of the fact that what educators perceive directly affects the way quality education is dispensed toward all children. This variation in response was also mirrored in the views of educators across three sections of the questionnaire: experience, training background, and specific circumstances that educators faced in their classrooms. This variation may speak to there being a need for recognition of a more differentiated approach to support the realization that different educators may require different amounts of support under particular circumstance. Proper professional development programs are flexible and responsive to the different needs, providing access by all educators to the kind of support that best fits their specific contexts. Conclusion This survey emphasizes the importance of needs for assistance in the inclusion of children with special needs into early childhood education. By focusing on professional development, resource distribution, and targeted support mechanisms, inclusive practices can be taken forward at the level of educational institutions. In the final analysis, it was not just enabling educators but also eventually create a learning environment where all children with abilities, disabilities, and varying needs come to learn meaningfully and reach their full potential. This means that the best and effective way to support inclusive education and treat all children with equal opportunities for learning is through ongoing dialogue among educators, policymakers, and other stakeholders.

CONCLUSION

From the findings of the survey of early childhood educators on attitudes towards the types and levels of support required to involve children with special needs, the findings point to some critical strategic moments that ascertain the business importance of access to quality support mechanisms in the context of early childhood education. The information available does indeed point out that educators do acknowledge the need for additional training, resources, and support staff required for carrying out the inclusion practices. This is an awareness of the challenges and pressures faced while trying to ensure that there is equitable educational experience in the classroom by taking into consideration every child. That a large and significant relationship exists between perceived assistance needs and inclusion initiatives' success suggests that educators, when supported, was adjust their teaching approaches, and create learning environments that are inclusive. It, therefore, calls upon the provision of professional development and resource provision to fit educators' different needs both on the policymakers and the

educational institution levels. Another aspect that emphasizes individual experiences and contexts of classrooms further lends strength to the requirement for customized support strategies. Nothing works across boundaries or applies universally; instead, specific initiatives towards challenges educators encounter would become significant enablers for improving the effectiveness of inclusion. Building a culture of inclusion in early childhood education is a collective responsibility, and educators, administrators, and policymakers need to make a concerted effort to work together over time. Let's talk about how providing support in the areas identified can help ensure more inclusive and equitable learning environments among educators by investing in professional development. It not only pays off to children with special needs but also enriches the experience of all students by encouraging social interaction, empathy, and a sense of belonging in diverse classrooms. It is also important to carry on this dialogue in the future as they fight for the changes necessary to support effective inclusion in early childhood education.

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