

EARLY CHILDHOOD PARTICIPATION: A SURVEY OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS'
PERSPECTIVES ON THE TYPES AND EXTENT OF SUPPORT REQUIRED FOR THE FULL
INCLUSION OF CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

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ABSTRACT

To successfully integrate children with special needs into conventional educational settings, this research analyzes the perspectives of preschool educators on the types and amounts of assistance that are essential. A total of 1,608 educators filled out a survey that used a 5-point Likert scale and a structured questionnaire to collect demographic information and assessed assistance requirements. The researcher used SPSS version 25's descriptive statistics and ANOVA to examine the quantitative and qualitative link between early childhood inclusion outcomes and assistance requirements. When asked about the vital need of increased personnel, resources, and preparation for effective inclusive practice, educators unanimously agreed that it was very important. Teachers felt that they couldn't meet the demands of all the students, as they all had different requirements, due to a lack of resources. The researchers wanted to find out whether there was a statistical correlation between teachers' perceptions of support and their capacity to make their classrooms welcoming to all students. Because statistical significance was intended, the study's p-value was determined to be less than 0.05. These results highlight the importance of teachers' backing as one of the most critical factors in launching and sustaining inclusive practices in preschools and kindergartens. Children with special needs may be completely included in learning processes thanks to the study's contribution to the existing literature, which sheds light on the types of assistance educators require to achieve inclusion. In order to ensure that all students in these schools have access to high-quality education, this report suggests changes that lawmakers and school districts should make to their professional development and resource allocation programs.

Keywords: Inclusion in early childhood education, Early childhood educators, Perspectives of educators, Comprehensive education

INTRODUCTION

This study seeks to understand the viewpoints of Chinese preschool teachers about inclusive education. The school should be held accountable for providing a structured early childhood education curriculum that prioritizes positive interactions. No matter a child's intelligence or physical ability, in China they may attend the preschool their parents choose. This is why researchers decided to conduct their investigation in China. In China, inclusive education has a solid intellectual and governmental basis, which has contributed to its success and widespread adoption. In China's comprehensive education system, which dates back to the country's educational reforms, teachers have always been crucial. Every kid, including those with special needs, deserves a chance at a good education, and early childhood educators strive tirelessly to make that happen (Douglas et al., 2021). There has been a plethora of options for high-quality childcare for Chinese parents for over a hundred years. Families who do not get financial aid from the government are free to pick whichever early childhood education programs they feel would benefit their children the most. Pacific Islanders have a lot of alternatives when it comes to childcare, including public and private kindergartens, community centers, playgroups, in-home care, and early development centers. They may select and choose what works best for them. To be eligible for consideration under the 2008 Early Childhood Education Laws, early childhood education programs in China must meet licencing standards and adhere to the country's early childhood curriculum. Students in China's preschools, kindergartens, and first grades are greatly influenced by their teachers in these early childhood education settings. In addition to preparing children for future academic and personal achievement, they should provide them opportunity to study, play, and relax. the researcher must make a stronger effort to support every child's academic success as they grow into responsible adults. If the researcher want the young students to thrive in their first few years of school, the researcher must pay close attention to what they have to say and take their views on education into account. Children are highly esteemed in many cultures for their knowledge and insight into topics that directly impact their lives and for providing reliable information on matters that might enhance their quality of life. One of the most fascinating aspects of becoming a teacher nowadays is working in the field of early childhood education, which focuses on educating young children. Within this larger domain, three distinct areas may be found: early intervention, early education, and childcare. Together, NAEYC and the Division of Early Development have defined inclusion in early development programs in a way that everyone can understand (Eilers, 2023). However, throughout the country, children with disabilities continue to encounter obstacles that hinder their participation in early development programs. Researchers have found numerous barriers that prevent professionals from providing high-quality inclusive early childhood education, including insufficient funding for early children's educators and the lack of a unified pre-service framework for training early development specialists. Academics and policymakers must collaborate to solve these interrelated problems, such as ensuring that all children with disabilities, even the smallest ones, are accommodated in the least restrictive setting and have access to programs designed for normally developing children. Examining the literature on inclusive practices for young children, this study covers a range of topics. These include the

following: the history of inclusive education in the US, different definitions of inclusion in early childhood, the viewpoints of educators, the administrative supports necessary for inclusion, the significance of specialized training and education, and the impact of guiding philosophies and curricula on inclusive practices. Finally, they learn that specialized training and education are crucial. Additional research is needed to address the challenges faced by early childhood educators in providing high-quality inclusive education and to ensure that all children with disabilities can participate in early development programs (Cherrington et al., 2021).

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

One of the most important parts of schooling is providing children with disabilities or special needs with access to high-quality early childhood education programs that meet their individual needs. A rising amount of data supports and emphasizes the importance of inclusive education for children with special needs, as opposed to their normally developing classmates. As a result, researchers are calling for this approach. A solid basis for a lifetime of learning and emotional well-being is laid by inclusion, which promotes social and cognitive development while giving all children a feeling of belonging. Early childhood educators have a significant barrier in establishing effective inclusive practices, despite the well-established advantages of inclusion for children. There is a correlation between teachers' perceptions of their own preparedness to make successful inclusive practice and the variability in training, resources, and support that influences the opportunities available to them. In order to accommodate students with a wide range of disabilities, many educators feel they lack the knowledge necessary to adapt their lessons and course materials. Understaffing, a lack of specialist resources, and insufficient opportunities for professional growth are common causes of this. Educators' views on the kinds and amounts of assistance needed to promote effective inclusion might vary greatly (Farrand et al., 2019). Personal encounters with disabled children, institutional policies, and community resources may all play a role in shaping these views. For the purpose of developing trainings and support structures that enhance instructors' ability to include all students, research on educators' viewpoints is crucial. Regarding the types and levels of assistance needed in fully inclusive classrooms, the paper sought to solicit the thoughts of early childhood educators. It is important to inform lawmakers, training programs, and educational institutions about the many requirements and challenges experienced by those working to create fully inclusive settings for all students. As a result of these results, the researcher now have a better idea of how to implement inclusive approaches in early childhood education to make it a welcoming space for all children (Gallagher, 2019).

PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH

The purpose of this study is to examine the perspectives of early childhood educators about the kind and level of assistance that is suitable for include children with special needs in regular classrooms. Researchers plan to conduct surveys and interviews with educators to learn about their experiences and perspectives on the challenges they face and the kinds of assistance they would need, such as personnel, funding, and professional development opportunities. In order to implement policies and practices that may help all students succeed in school, it is essential to have a firm grasp of these perspectives. Educators have a wide range of demands, and the study aims to shed light on those needs so that resources and professional development programs may be better tailored to meet those needs.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The well-known concept of inclusive education highlights the significance of educational equality. However, this is not enough to guarantee full participation for marginalized groups and children with disabilities. There are still many problems with inclusive education's implementation in schools when it comes to implementing its ideals. Students from all walks of life and with different skill sets and academic aptitudes collaborate in an inclusive classroom to gain knowledge and skills. Research has shown that inclusive practices can be grouped into the following: (a) when parents are treated with the same level of respect and given equal rights as other children in the community; (b) when families are valued and supported; (c) when all children are treated with equal rights and respect; and (d) when children with special needs have equal access to educational and social opportunities as their typically developing peers. Educators work to build a feeling of community and belonging among students and their families by emphasizing the significance of social justice and morality. Although the inclusion policy has been around for a while, its efficacy in preschools and other early childhood settings is still debatable. The purpose of the assessments carried out by the Education Review Office (ERO) is to ensure that Chinese preschools and kindergartens provide enough quality education. Inclusion, as opposed to a one-size-fits-all strategy, ensures that every student may succeed in class by placing them in groups with others who share or differ from their own traits. Special education for children includes a curriculum, guiding principles, resources, methods of collaboration, and a strategy for assisting young children in developing respectful and caring interactions with others. According to the Ministry of Education (2017), schools must ensure that students with special needs are fully integrated into the regular student body, get the appropriate care, and are treated as unique individuals. As a result, it is critical that all preschools and kindergartens provide an inclusive education that welcomes and supports students with special needs. An inclusive early childhood setting is one that welcomes and supports both typically developing children and those with special needs. All children benefit from more social engagement, better developmental outcomes, and empathy when they grow up in an inclusive environment, according to research. Teachers' readiness and the resources they have at their disposal are crucial to inclusion's success. Researchers have shown that early childhood educators vary greatly in their use of

inclusion strategies and that the majority of them do not feel well-prepared to address their kids' needs. Educators have additional difficulties in providing adequate student assistance due to systemic impediments, such as inadequate funding and personnel. The existing literature emphasizes the need of understanding educators' viewpoints about the types and amounts of assistance they believe are essential for children's inclusion. Efforts were made to bridge the gaps so that educators may be better prepared to establish inclusive classrooms where all children can get excellent early childhood education. This will allow for the development of future policies and training (Karaolis, 2020).

RESEARCH QUESTION

How does health status play a role when it comes to early childhood inclusion?

METHODOLOGY

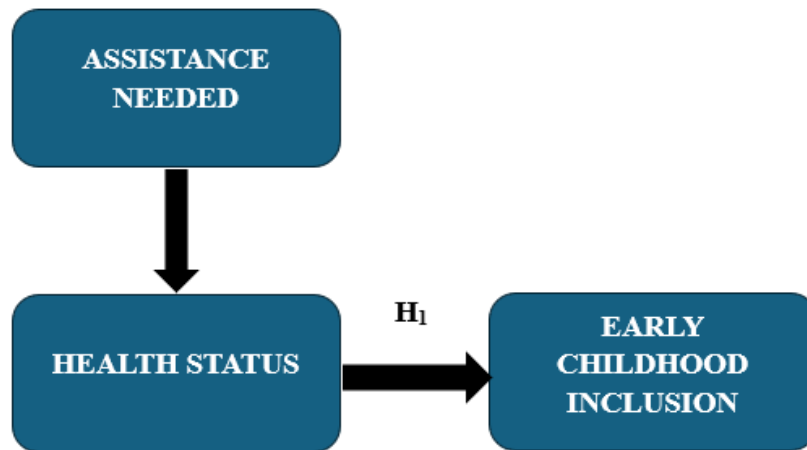
Research design: Quantitative data analysis was conducted using SPSS version 25. The combination of the odds ratio and the 95% confidence interval provided information about the nature and trajectory of this statistical association. The p-value was set at less than 0.05 as the statistical significance level. The data was analyzed descriptively to provide a comprehensive understanding of its core characteristics. Quantitative approaches are characterized 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



RESULT

FACTOR ANALYSIS

The process of verifying the underlying component structure of a set of measurement items was a widely used application of Factor Analysis (FA). The observed variables' scores were believed to be influenced by hidden factors that were not directly visible. The accuracy analysis (FA) technique was a model-based approach. The primary emphasis of this study was on the construction of causal pathways that connect observable occurrences, latent causes, and measurement inaccuracies. The appropriateness of the data for factor analysis may be assessed by using the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) Method. The adequacy of the sampling for each model variable as well as the overall model was assessed. The statistics quantify the extent of possible common variation across many variables. Typically, data with lower percentages tends to be more suited for factor analysis.

KMO returns integers between zero and one. Sampling was deemed adequate if the KMO value falls within the range of 0.8 to 1.

It is necessary to take remedial action if the KMO is less than 0.6, which indicates that the sampling is inadequate. Use their best discretion; some authors use 0.5 as this, therefore the range is 0.5 to 0.6.

- If the KMO is close to 0, it means that the partial correlations were large compared to the overall correlations. Component analysis is severely hindered by large correlations, to restate.

Kaiser's cutoffs for acceptability are as follows:

A dismal 0.050 to 0.059.

- 0.60 - 0.69 below-average

Typical range for a middle grade: 0.70-0.79.

Having a quality point value between 0.80 and 0.89.

The range from 0.90 to 1.00 is stunning.

Table: KMO and Bartlett's

KMO and Bartlett's Test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.870
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	3252.968
	df	190
	Sig.	.000

The overall significance of the correlation matrices was further confirmed by using Bartlett's Test of Sphericity. A value of 0.870 was the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin sampling adequacy. By using Bartlett's sphericity test, researchers found a p-value of 0.00. A significant test result from Bartlett's sphericity test demonstrated that the correlation matrix was not a correlation matrix.

INDEPENDENT VARIABLE

Assistance Need: When the researcher talk about the kinds and levels of help that classroom instructors and students need to thrive in inclusive settings, we're talking about assistance need. As an example of a support, this might take the form of specialized training for educators, the provision of supplementary materials and personnel, or the development of adaptive pedagogical approaches (Shaeffer, 2019).

FACTOR

Health Status: A person's health status may be described as their subjective evaluation of their own health, which can range from outstanding to fair to bad. Important health outcomes, such as functional status, mortality, and morbidity, are predicted by reported health status. It is often regarded as an accurate measure of

an individual's overall health. A person's health state may be measured in a variety of ways using a wide range of markers. Disability, illness frequency and severity, and levels of physical, mental, emotional, and social functioning are all part of it. Methods for determining a person's health state include medical records, self-reports, and standardized tests. Obtaining a full evaluation and facilitating epidemiological analysis and trend tracking requires collecting numerous characteristics of health status (Ainscow, 2020).

DEPENDENT VARIABLE

Early Childhood Inclusion: All children and their families, regardless of their abilities, have the right to be fully integrated into all aspects of family life, communities, and society at large. This principle is encapsulated in early childhood inclusion policies, practices, and beliefs. A feeling of community and belonging, strong friendships and social connections, and the opportunity to learn and grow to one's maximum potential are all goals of inclusive experiences for families with and without disabilities. Access, participation, and supports are the defining aspects of inclusion that may be used to identify high-quality early childhood programs and services (Alanazi & Alhazmi, 2023).

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HEALTH STATUS AND EARLY CHILDHOOD INCLUSION

Inclusion in early childhood programs and health status are highly correlated and mutually influential. When it comes to inclusive early childhood settings, a child's health is a major factor. For a kid to fully participate in group activities, they may need special accommodations for physical health issues including chronic diseases or impairments. The need of early intervention and assistance becomes even more apparent when considering the impact of mental and emotional health difficulties, such as trauma or anxiety, on social and educational involvement. In contrast, research has shown that children's health improves in inclusive early childhood settings. Being a member of a welcoming community reduces feelings of loneliness and boosts mental health via increased opportunities for social engagement. These settings often include health-related and therapy services, enabling interventions and support in real-time. On top of that, regular tests in these types of environments may help find and treat health problems early on, which in turn can avert more serious consequences (Antony, 2022).

H01: "There is no significant relationship between Health status and Early Childhood Inclusion"

H1: "There is a significant relationship between Health status and Early Childhood Inclusion"

Table 2: H₁ ANOVA Test

ANOVA					
Sum					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	39588.620	648	5655.517	611.212	.000
Within Groups	492.770	959	5.356		
Total	40081.390	1607			

In this study, the result is significant. The value of F is 611.212 , 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 Health Status and Early Childhood Inclusion*” is accepted and the null hypothesis is rejected.

DISCUSSION

Significant insights about the status of current-inclusive practices in early childhood education have been uncovered by this study of early childhood educators regarding their perspectives of the kinds and levels of assistance needed to include children with special needs. This kind of practitioner is a key player in creating inclusive workplaces; by listening to their perspectives on the challenges and resources that need to be in place for successful implementation, the researcher may learn a lot. To start, many educators believe they need more support and education to meet the requirements of their special education children, according to the statistics. This lines up with the broader literature, which goes so far as to say that professional advancement was hindered by a lack of preparation and an excess of ineptitude. Teachers have voiced the importance of robust professional development and workshop programs in preparing them to alter their pedagogical approaches and course content. The development of such skills among teachers has the potential to make classrooms safer and more welcoming places for kids of all backgrounds. However, to help with inclusive practice, the findings of the questionnaire show that instructional aids and additional staff assistance are the most important additional resources. It is stressed that without sufficient supplemental personnel, individual help on bigger courses is not feasible. Consequently, there must be crystal-clear organizational resource planning. Spaces that enable children with special needs to access meaningful connections and learning experiences were created by integrating greater levels of staffing or expert assistant assistance inside educational environments. Third, it's essential to consider the connection between how much help people feel they need and the good effects of inclusion. Teachers are more likely to implement successful inclusive techniques when they get help, according to the data. When support interference is there, it does not necessarily help the process; in fact, it may be a real obstacle to education for children with special needs. Because educators' perceptions directly impact the distribution of excellent

education to all students, this link further emphasizes the significance of recognizing and being able to erase challenges they confront in inclusive settings. This diversity of opinion was reflected in the responses of educators across all three parts of the survey: background in training, particular classroom situations, and experience. Different educators may need varying degrees of assistance depending on the specifics of the situation, and this diversity may indicate the need for a more tailored strategy to address this reality. To ensure that all educators have access to the assistance that works best in their individual situations, quality professional development programs are adaptable and sensitive to various requirements. In summary Findings from this study highlight the significance of support requirements for integrating children with special needs into preschool programs. Educational institutions may advance inclusive practices by concentrating on professional development, distributing resources, and providing targeted support mechanisms. In the end, it was about more than simply helping teachers do their jobs better; it was about making sure that kids of all talents, capacities, and needs could study in an inclusive setting where they could thrive. This implies that educators, legislators, and other stakeholders need to keep talking if they want to promote inclusive education and provide all kids with a fair shot at learning.

CONCLUSION

To determine the business importance of having access to quality support mechanisms in the context of early childhood education, the results of the survey of early childhood educators regarding their attitudes towards the types and levels of support needed to include children with special needs highlight certain critical strategic moments. Educators do recognize the need for further training, materials, and support personnel to implement the inclusion practices, according to the available data. This is a cognizance of the difficulties and demands that come with striving to provide every student a fair chance to learn in the classroom. It seems that educators were able to modify their teaching methods and provide inclusive learning environments when given the resources they needed, since there is a strong correlation between reported help requirements and the effectiveness of inclusion programs. Consequently, it demands that politicians and educational institutions meet the varying requirements of teachers via providing professional development and resources. Customized assistance solutions are even more important because of another factor that highlights the importance of students' unique experiences and classroom environments. Rather than relying on broad, one-size-fits-all solutions, educators may benefit greatly from targeted efforts to address the unique obstacles they face in the classroom. It will take time and a combined effort by teachers, principals, and lawmakers to create an inclusive environment in preschools and kindergartens. Let's discuss how investing in educators' professional development might assist in creating more inclusive and equitable learning environments by giving support in the listed areas. Benefiting children with special needs is only the beginning; inclusive classrooms foster social connection, empathy, and a feeling of belonging for all kids. As they continue to advocate for reforms that will allow for

more effective inclusion in preschool programs, it is critical that they keep this conversation going (Bartolo et al., 2019).

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