INCLUSION IN THE EAST: CHINESE STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

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A sample of 523 Chinese university students was given a questionnaire on their attitudes towards the inclusion of children with disabilities into regular classrooms. Factor analysis, analysis of variance, t-test and correlations were used to assess the respondents' general attitude towards inclusion, the factor structure of the attitudes, the relationship between demographic variables and the attitudes and the ratings of best educational environments for students with different kinds of disabilities. The analysis revealed that (a) the participants' average attitude towards inclusion was slightly negative; (b) four factors, named as Social justice, Meeting the special needs of the pupils with severe disabilities, Quality of education and Teachers' competence, were extracted (c) the most important background variable that explained the attitudes was the participants' major subject in the University; and (d) the ratings for the best educational environment for a student with a disability varied according to different types and levels of disability.

Introduction

Inclusion

Regardless of the strong international consensus towards inclusion as a universal goal, there is still strong debate over the concept of inclusion itself (Ainscow & César 2006; Kavale & Forness 2000; Dyson 1999; Unesco 1994, 2000; United Nations 1993). Unesco (2005) defines inclusion as a process of addressing and responding to the diverse needs of all learners, so it refers to all groups at risk of marginalisation and exclusion, not only to persons with disabilities (Unesco 2005). Nevertheless, inclusion is still often seen as concerning only children with disabilities and *special educational needs* although the alternative views of inclusion have gained strength. However, the confusion caused by competing views on inclusion may have a negative effect on the development of thinking, policies and practices around the globe (Ainscow & César 2006). Some critics claim that the inclusion debate has abandoned evidence based on research and shifted to the ideological level, where sensible discussion about the topic is extremely difficult (Kavale & Forness 2000). Some researchers still support the traditional special education system (e.g. Hockenbury et al., 2000), claiming, for example, that even though there is a lot to improve in special education, improvements are made through developing more efficient special education practices not through philosophical debate. Because of the ambiguities of the concept of inclusion and the inclusion movement, Dyson (1999) suggests that there may be different types of inclusions which can be found from the different discourses on inclusion. Although it may be difficult to unify these discourses, assimilating them may offer possibilities to develop new ways of thinking about inclusion (Dyson 1999).

Chinese inclusive education

Chinese inclusive education, commonly named as *suiban jiudu,* has ideological as well as pragmatic roots. International campaigns supporting inclusion, like the 1989 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of the Child, followed by the Education for all declarations of UNESCO in 1990 and 2000 and the Salamanca statement in 1994, have all had influence in the development of inclusive education in China (Potts 2000). Since the 1980s the Chinese legislation has also begun to promote an inclusive approach in education (Deng & Manset 2000; Deng et al., 2001; McCabe 2003). An important reason behind the progress of inclusion in China is perhaps finance. The number of children with disabilities going to school is growing and building a network of special schools for them would be too expensive. Accepting children with disabilities into regular classrooms is perhaps seen as a cost-effective approach (McCabe 2003). According to Deng & Manset (2000), it has been estimated that providing separate

special education only for the nearly 5 million intellectually disabled children in China would require establishing at least 210 000 new special schools. One of the most important challenges for inclusive education in China are large class sizes. In 2006, nearly one third of primary school classes in China had over 45 students (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China 2007). In large classes, teachers easily prefer a standardized curriculum and whole-group teaching instead of more individualized methods (McCabe 2003). Another barrier against inclusion is the Chinese school culture that emphasises selection and competition. Teachers are commonly rated on the basis of what percentage of their students are enrolled into the most prestigious secondary education schools (Deng & Manset 2000; Deng et al. 2001).

Attitudes towards inclusive education studies

According to Bizer et al., (2003) attitude is a rather enduring and universal evaluation of a person, object or issue. The popularity of attitudinal research has been based on the assumption that attitudes can predict and explain social behaviour. Empirical evidence has not always supported this assumption. (Ajzen & Fishbein 2005.)

Research on attitudes towards inclusive education has concentrated strongly on the teachers' and university students' attitudes. According to research made in western countries, teachers and university students seem to support inclusive education (Scruggs & Mastropieri 1996; Jobe et al. 1996; Monahan et al., 1996; Avramidis & Bayliss 2000; Burke & Sutherland 2004). Some results suggest that attitudes towards inclusive education in non-western countries might be more negative (Alghazo & Gaad 2004; Leyser et al. 1994). Scruggs & Mastropieri (1996) point out that teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education may be strongly linked to practical concerns and may, thus, be more negative when teachers are asked to accept students with disabilities in their own classrooms. Avramidis & Norwich (2002) mention that regardless of positive attitudes towards inclusion, only a small percentage of teachers support so-called full inclusion (Avramidis & Norwich 2002). The two most important factors affecting attitudes towards inclusion are the type and severity of the students' disability (Avramidis & Norwich; Scruggs & Mastropieri 1996; Jobe et al. 1996; Moberg & Savolainen 2003). Those students with physical or sensory disability or mild mental retardation seem to be the ones most easily accepted into general education classrooms, whereas students with severe or multiple disabilities are most often rejected (Avramidis & Norwich 2002). The biggest differences between countries seem to be in the attitudes towards inclusion of pupils with sensory impairments (Avramidis & Norwich 2002).

The Chinese research on attitudes towards inclusive education has mainly concentrated on the attitudes of primary school general education teachers. Only in recent years have researchers began to pay attention to other target groups (Chen et al., 2006). However, research findings on Chinese teachers' general attitudes towards inclusion could best be described as inconsistent. Some studies suggest that attitudes are slightly positive (Peng 2000; Peng 2003; Wan & Huang 2005), while other studies have found that attitudes towards inclusive education are clearly negative (Wei et al., 2001; Wei & Yuen. 2000). Furthermore, the findings of Wei et al. (2001) in Beijing and Hong Kong suggest that attitudes towards inclusive education may vary a lot between the different regions of China.

Differences have also been found in attitudes between different groups of teachers in China. Chen (2006) and Wei & Yuen (2000) suggest that Chinese special education teachers see inclusion more positively than Chinese general education teachers. Chen (2006) also adds that general education teachers' attitudes change greatly in a negative direction if asked to accept students with disabilities into their own class. Teachers' gender seems to have no relationship with attitudes towards inclusive education in China (Peng 2000; Wan & Huang 2005; Wei & Yuen 2000). Liu et al., (2000) and Peng (2003) found that receiving education on inclusion can make teachers' attitudes more positive. The type and severity of the students' disability is strongly related to inclusion attitudes in China. In summary, Chinese teachers and university students seem to be most positive towards the inclusion of students with visual or physical impairments and most negative towards the inclusion of students with mental retardation and emotional or behaviour problems. (Chen 2006; Liu et al., 2000; Wan & Huang 2005; Wei et al., 2001)

Research questions

The research questions this study aimed to answer were:

1. What is the participants' general attitude towards inclusive education?
1.1 What is the structure of their attitudes?
1.2 How are participants' background factors related to their attitudes towards inclusive education?
2. Which educational environments are rated the best for students with different kind of disabilities?

Method

Participants

523 Chinese students participated in this study. 75.7% of the participants were studying at normal universities (shifan daxue) that have teacher training as their main function. 20.5% of the participants were studying at universities (daxue) and 3.8% at other institutions. The most common major subjects taken by the participants were foreign languages (19.4%), computer science/information technology (11.0 %), Chinese language and literature (10.6%), history (7.0%) and education (6.2%). The remaining 45.7 % of the participants had one of the other 13 subjects as their major subject. The percentage of the participants who had received education on teaching disabled children in regular classrooms was 8.6%. The participants' most common home provinces were Beijing (36.5%), Hebei (8.1%), Guangdong (7.3%), Henan (5.1%) and Shanxi (4.9%). The majority (53.0%) came from hometowns with populations exceeding 4 million inhabitants. Two thirds of the participants were female (67.7%) and one third male (32.3%). The participants' age ranged from 17 to 43 years, their mean age being 26.5 years (SD = 5.51). The concept of inclusion was *very* or *rather familiar* to little more than half (54.0%) of the participants. Most participants (64.4%) had previous experience with disabled persons. As many as 91.5% of them claimed that their experiences with disabled persons had been *very* or *rather positive* and only 8.5% had *rather* or *very negative* experiences.

Procedure

Data were gathered with the use of a questionnaire form. The first section of the questionnaire included an attitude scale used earlier by Moberg & Savolainen (2003). It was used to assess the participants' general attitudes towards inclusive education. The scale contains 20 items on a four-point Likert scale. Each item was scored from 1 to 4, the highest score referring to the most positive attitude towards inclusive education. Cronbach alfa reliability for the scale was adequate (0.76).

In the second section, participants were asked to choose which educational environment would be the most suitable for students with different disabilities (see Moberg & Savolainen (2003). This section contained 14 items with six options. The options were (1) full-time in an ordinary classroom; (2) most of the time (over 75%) in an ordinary classroom; (3) most of the time in a special class; (4) full-time in a special class; (5) full-time in a separate special school; (6) full-time in a special institution. The most suitable environments were rated for seven different types of disability, each being defined as moderate or severe, respectively.

The participants were also asked to provide personal background information. The questionnaire included items about the participants' age, sex, number of siblings, number of co-habitants, form of accommodation, experience with disabled persons, hometown location, hometown's population, type of educational institution currently enrolled in, major subject, prior education or training related to inclusive teaching and knowledge of concepts related to inclusive education.

The questionnaire was originally written in English and then translated into Chinese. To ensure that the Chinese version was consistent with the English version, it was first translated by a native Chinese person, then revised by another native Chinese speaker and finally checked by a third native speaker. All three persons that took part in the translation process had a good command of both Mandarin Chinese and English.

Most of the participants (472) completed the paper version of the questionnaire at two Normal university campus areas in Beijing. A few participants (51) completed the questionnaire via internet or e-mail. As there were no significant differences between the responses given by paper and electronic versions of the questionnaire, all responses were analyzed as a one sample.

Results

Participants' general attitude towards inclusive education

The participants' general attitude towards inclusive education was normally distributed and slightly negative. The theoretical range of the scale was from 20 to 80, the score of 50 being the neutral mid-point of the scale. The actual range of the participants' scores was from 27 to 67 the mean score being 47.40 and standard deviation 6.75. (Fig. 1.)

The structure of their attitudes

A principal axis factor analysis with oblimin rotation was performed on the attitude scale. (Table 1) Analysis led to a four-factor solution which explained 45.0 % of the total variance. The factors were

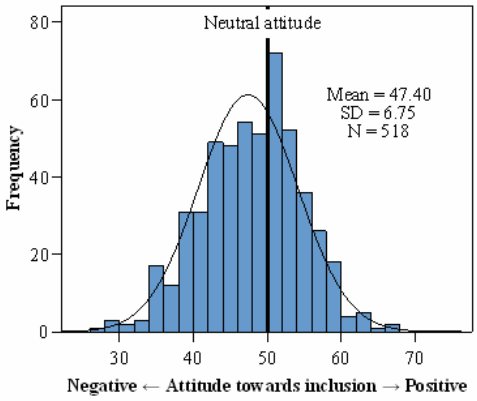

Figure 1
The participants' general attitude towards inclusive education.

Table 1
Factor analysis (principal axis, oblimin rotation) of the participants' (N = 518) attitudes toward inclusive education.

Item	I	II	III	IV
1.12 Placing pupils with disabilities full-time in regular classes means quality education for all.	0.787			
1.5 Full-time placement of pupils with disabilities in ordinary classes means equity for all pupils.	0.785			
1.18 Achievement levels of pupils with disabilities would increase if they were placed full-time in the ordinary classroom.	0.534			
1.4 The self-esteem of pupils with disabilities would improve if placed full-time in the ordinary classroom.	0.515			
1.15 Pupils with disabilities would lose the stigma/label of being "dumb", "different", or "failures" if placed full-time in the ordinary classroom.	0.497			
1.16 It is right to ask ordinary class teachers to accept pupils with severe disabilities into their classes.	0.448			
1.20 Pupils with severe behaviour disorders do not need special education in special schools.		0.626		
1.19 Special needs of pupils with severe disabilities do not require teaching in special classrooms.		0.548		
1.13 Pupils who display severe forms of behaviour problems do not need special classes.		0.452		
1.11 Pupils like to be also with those with whom they do not share common characteristics or concerns.		0.317		
1.1 All pupils will receive appropriate educational programs and related services in ordinary education		-0.315		
1.8 Having pupils with disabilities in ordinary education classes will not interfere with the quality of education offered to pupils considered as non-disabled			0.667	
1.17 Time for teaching of the non-disabled is not taken away when pupils with disabilities are placed in ordinary classrooms.			0.620	
1.9 Also, teachers who have not received special education training are able to teach effectively pupils with severe disabilities.				0.642
1.10 Ordinary class teachers can meet the academic needs of pupils with disabilities currently in their classrooms.				0.427
1.7 Non-disabled children and children with severe disabilities should be taught in the same classrooms.				0.357
1.3 Pupils with disabilities are not rejected, ridiculed, and/or teased by other pupils in the regular classroom.				0.335

Note 1. Loadings with absolute value less than 0.3 are omitted. The factors were named as I = Social justice, II = Meeting the special needs of the pupils with severe disabilities, III = Quality of education for non-disabled students, IV = Teachers' competence
Note 2. Items 1.2; 1.3; 1.7; 1.8; 1.9; 1.11; 1.13; 1.17; 1.19; and 1.20 that were negatively phrased in the original questionnaire have been reversed.

named as: (i) Social justice (inclusion is the right of disabled students and they will benefit from that educationally and socially); (ii) Meeting the special needs of the pupils with severe disabilities (who need education in special classes) ; (iii) Quality of education for non-disabled students (for which inclusion does not affect negatively); and (iv) Teachers' competence (is sufficient to teach disabled children in regular classrooms).

Relationships of some demographic variables and attitudes towards inclusive education
The participants' demographic factors were compared with both their general attitude towards inclusive education and attitudinal factors represented by factor scores. The only statistically significant ($p<0.01$) negative correlation was between the participants' age and Factor II. This indicates that younger participants had a more positive perception towards *Meeting the special needs of the pupils with severe disabilities*.

The effect of the students' major subject on their attitudes was tested with a One-way ANOVA test (see Table 2). The participants' major subject area was significantly related to their general attitude towards inclusive education, ($F = 4.88$; $p<0.001$) Factor I *Social justice* ($F = 3.68$; $p<0.01$) and Factor IV *Teachers' competence* ($F = 4.613$; $p<0.001$). The quality of experience with people with disabilities was related to Factor III *Quality of education for non-disabled students* ($F = 2.948$; $p<0.05$).

Table 2
Means, standard deviations, F-values (One-way ANOVA) and Post Hoc analyses for the attitudes towards inclusive education (general attitude and factors) of respondents with different major subject groups

	General	Factor I	Factor II	Factor III	Factor IV
Major subject	mean (std)	mean (std)	mean (std)	mean (std)	mean (std)
1 Behavioral	44.453 7.792	-0.373 1.004	0.050 0.756	-0.176 0.896	-0.249 0.830
2 Social	49.073 6.417	0.169 0.901	0.082 0.887	0.156 0.763	0.259 0.825
3 Mathematics/ natural	48.062 6.266	0.069 0.850	0.001 0.906	-0.034 0.768	0.060 0.797
4 Language/ literature	47.101 6.800	0.012 0.930	-0.080 0.716	0.000 0.761	-0.111 0.748
5 Other major	48.002 6.137	0.038 0.886	0.067 0.628	0.121 0.824	0.132 0.835
F-test	4.88, p=.001	3.68, p=.006	0.678, p=.608	1.81, p=.126	4.61, p=.001
Post hoc test	1 < 2, 3, 5	1< 2, 3, 4			1< 2; 4 <2

Note. (1 Behavioral = education, early childhood education, special education, psychology; 2 Social = politics and law, sociology, history; 3 Mathematics/natural = mathematics, physics, biology, chemistry, computer science/information technology, geography; 4 Language/literature = foreign language, Chinese language and literature; 5 Other = art or music, sports, other major)

The post hoc analyses (Table 2) revealed that participants majoring in behavioural science had a more negative general attitude towards inclusive education than participants whose major was in the areas of social science ($p<0.001$), mathematics/natural science ($p<0.01$), or other ($p<0.05$). Behavioural science majors' attitude towards *Social justice* (Factor I) was more negative than the attitudes of the participants majoring in social science ($p<0.01$), mathematics/natural science ($p<0.01$) or Language/literature ($p<0.05$). Participants', whose major area was behavioural science, perception of regular education *Teachers' competence* (Factor IV) to teach disabled children was significantly more negative compared to participants majoring in social science ($p<0.001$). Participants majoring in language/literature also had a more negative attitude towards *Teachers' competence* than participants from the area of social science ($p<0.05$). Moreover the Post-hoc analysis demonstrated that having experiences with people with disabilities was significantly related to scores for Factor III *Quality of education for non-disabled students,* in such a way that participants whose experiences were *rather negative* had more pessimistic views than participants with *very positive* ($p<0.05$) or *rather positive* ($p<0.05$) experiences.

The other investigated demographic variables: participants' gender; number of siblings; number of co-habitants; type of accommodation; hometown's location; hometown's population; institution; education related to inclusive teaching; or knowledge of concepts related to inclusive education, did not have any significant relation towards attitudes related to inclusion.

The ratings for the best educational environments for students with different kinds of disabilities
The participants were asked to evaluate the most suitable educational environment for different types of disability. They were also requested to differentiate between the general notion of moderate and severe levels for each disability. The most inclusive educational environment was recommended for students with visual impairment (M = 2.20; SD = 1.08) and most restrictive environment for students with mental retardation. The ratings for all disability groups as a whole and across moderate and severe levels of disability are shown in Table 3.

Table 3
Participants' (N = 512) ratings of best educational environment for students with different kinds of disabilities (Mean, standard deviation and 95% confidence interval).

Student with	M	SD	95% confidence	Severity of disability	M	SD	95% confidence
Visual impairment	2.20	1.08	2.11–2.29	moderate	1.69	0.98	1.60–1.77
				severe	2.71	1.37	2.59–2.83
Speech impairment	2.85	0.93	2.77–2.93	moderate	2.16	0.92	2.08–2.24
				severe	3.54	1.16	3.44–3.64
Hearing impairment	2.96	1.03	2.87–3.04	moderate	2.40	1.04	2.31–2.49
				severe	3.51	1.19	3.41–3.61
Specific learning difficulty	3.15	0.90	3.07–3.23	moderate	2.53	.91	2.45–2.61
				severe	3.78	1.08	3.68–3.87
Physical and health impairment	3.37	1.40	3.24–3.49	moderate	2.67	1.46	2.54–2.79
				severe	4.06	1.60	3.93–4.20
Behaviour problems	3.40	1.15	3.30–3.49	moderate	2.74	1.21	2.63–2.84
				severe	4.05	1.32	3.94–4.17
Mental retardation	3.92	1.06	3.83–4.01	moderate	3.22	1.17	3.12–3.33
				severe	4.61	1.19	4.51–4.72

Note. Means refer to the following scale: 1 = full-time in an ordinary classroom; 2 = most of the time (over 75%) in an ordinary classroom; 3 = most of the time in a special class; 4 = full-time in a special class; 5 = full-time in a separate special school; 6 = full-time in a special institution.

Table 3 demonstrates that the level of disability had a relationship with the ratings of the best educational environment within every disability group, so that the most suitable educational environment for students with moderate disability was significantly more inclusive than for those students with severe disability. Furthermore, the differences between different disabilities were all statistically significant, as indicated by the non-overlapping 95% confidence intervals.

Discussion
Attitudes towards inclusion
The participants' general attitude towards inclusive education appeared to be slightly negative. This result differs from most findings on western cultures but is rather consistent with the results of earlier research in mainland China (Scruggs & Mastropieri 1996; Avramidis & Norwich 2002; Wan & Huang 2005; Wei et al. 2001; Wei & Yuen 2000). It is worth noticing that although the general attitude towards inclusion in this sample was not positive, the participants were positive towards several individual items in the questionnaire. According to Fabrigar et al. (2005), this kind of attitudinal ambivalence is quite normal and, as Risbjerg Thomsen (2006) suggests, particularly common in East-Asian cultures.

The four factor attitudinal structure found in this study was almost identical with the structure Moberg & Savolainen (2003) discovered among Finnish and Zambian teachers. This suggests that in different cultures the attitudes towards inclusive education may be formed by rather similar underlying factors. The first factor *Social justice* is a reference to the universal principles of equality, while the remaining three factors, *Meeting the special needs of the pupils with severe disabilities*; *Quality of education for non-disabled students*; and *Teachers' competence*, are more connected to the practical implementation of inclusion. The factor structure seems to indicate that inclusion is a question of both principle and practice.

In this study, only a few demographic variables were found to be related to the attitudes towards inclusive education. For example, the participants' gender, education related to inclusive teaching, experience with people with disabilities, hometown's location or hometown's population did not have any significant relationship with the attitudes. This finding is somewhat similar with earlier research in both China and elsewhere, as there have not been many demographic variables that consistently predict attitudes towards inclusion.

One variable that did have a relationship with the students' attitude towards inclusion was the participants' major. The students majoring in behavioural science (psychology, special education, education or early childhood education) had the most negative general attitude towards inclusive education, while the attitudes of students majoring in social sciences were most positive. One explanation might be that students in the different major groups form their attitudes based on different sources of information. Possibly, the attitudes of students majoring in behavioural sciences are related to their experiences in the practical implementation of inclusive education and its effect on everyday life in schools, while the attitudes of students majoring in social sciences are guided by the universally accepted principles that lay behind inclusion.

Educational environments rated the best for students with different kinds of disabilities

The type and severity of the students' disability have been the two most important factors affecting attitudes toward inclusion (Avramidis & Norwich; Scruggs & Mastropieri 1996). Also, in our study, the type and severity of the students' disability had a significant relation with the best educational environment rated by the participants. Among different disability groups, the participants' were most willing to accept the students with visual impairment into regular classrooms. This positive attitude towards the inclusion of students with visual impairment appears to be a distinctly Chinese phenomenon, as similar findings have been made in many other studies in mainland China (Chen 2006, Liu et al. 2000; Peng 2003; Wang & Huang 2005). One possible explanation for this phenomenon is that the first successful inclusion programmes in China were targeted for students' with visual impairment (Deng & Manset 2000).

The participants of our study were reluctant to accept students with physical impairment into regular classrooms, while these students have usually been willingly accepted in other studies in both China and other countries (Avramidis & Norwich 2002; Chen et al. 2006; Wan & Huang 2005; Wei et al. 2001). On the other hand, Moberg & Savolainen (2003) found that Zambian teachers in their sample were also strongly against the inclusion of students with physical impairment. Moberg & Savolainen (2003) hypothesised this could be due to long and difficult distances to the nearest school. Difficult transportation conditions in rural and mountainous parts of China are one possible explanation for the negative attitude towards the inclusion of physically impaired students found in the present study. Another explanation could be the important role of physical training in Chinese schools, which may cause problems for students with physical impairment.

The findings of this study differ from the findings of previous research on attitudes towards inclusion in China in two ways. First, most Chinese studies have been conducted with primary school general education teachers. This study assessed the attitudes of Chinese university students. Second, in this study the data was gathered using a questionnaire which has not been formerly used in a Chinese context. Both modifications help to contribute to an understanding of attitudes towards inclusion in China. A third intended modification was the gathering of data from students studying outside the major cities of China. Ultimately, due to practical reasons, the data of this study, like the data of most Chinese research on attitudes towards inclusion, is mainly from a major city (Beijing). As the majority of the millions of children with disabilities in China live outside the biggest cities, in prospective studies data gathering should also be done in the rural and more remote areas.

Though inclusive education is an official goal in China, attitudes towards it appear to be negative or at best neutral. It is quite common to state that a negative attitude is caused by the peoples' lack of knowledge. An alternative explanation is that people are already quite well informed but the conclusions they have formed based on that information are different from the official policy. Appreciating these conclusions may offer a potential way to reveal existing barriers facing inclusion and the removal of those barriers would be the best possible promotion of inclusion.

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