

Investigation on the Current Situation of Elective Special Education Courses in Preschool Education Major from the Perspective of Inclusive Education: Based on a Case Study of a University in Sichuan Province

Bei Chen¹, Qingqing Wang²

¹*Xi'an Eurasia University, Xi'an, Shaanxi Province, 710065, China*

²*Xi'an Lintong Special School, Xi'an, Shaanxi Province, 710600, China*

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Abstract: The "Second Phase of Special Education Improvement Plan" clearly pointed out that strengthening the training of special teachers in preschool education and the guidance for opening special education courses, and the cultivation of preschool education students' integrated educational literacy has become an important issue. The "Key Points of the Ministry of Education's Work in 2021" further proposes to speed up the extension of special education to the "two ends" and comprehensively promote inclusive education. Through the investigation on the implementation of special education courses of preschool education students, the results found that there were differences in the course cognition and course willingness of students in different grades, and accordingly, corresponding opinions and suggestions were put forward from three aspects: students' learning methods, course content and teaching organization form.

1. Research Background

Since the *Salamanca Statement* was issued in 1994, inclusive education has attracted the attention of all countries and set off a reform trend aiming at "promoting educational fairness" and "making all children succeed" in the world. The *Special Education Promotion Scheme II (2017-2020)* points out that "qualified institutions of higher learning are encouraged to strengthen the training of special education teachers for pre-school, general high school and vocational education. Special education courses are generally offered for demonstration majors in ordinary normal colleges and comprehensive colleges".^[1] Obviously, the cultivation of inclusive education literacy of preschool education majors has become an important issue. The *Essentials for Work of the Ministry of Education in 2021* further puts forward that it is imperative to speed up special education to "extend at both ends"^[2] and comprehensively promote inclusive education.

Preschool inclusive education refers to a form of education in which children aged 3-6 with developmental disabilities and normal children are placed in the same educational environment and provided with special support and services to integrate special education with general education.^[3] As a result, the function of pre-school education is bound to expand. Teachers should have the

ability to integrate general education and special education, and their professional requirements should be diversified and their professional standards be further improved. In the context of inclusive education, colleges and universities should make a reasonable and timely response to the training of preschool education professionals, and the construction of talent training programs will eventually return to the curriculum itself. In this paper, the students majoring in preschool education in a university in Sichuan province were investigated, whose school of education has set up special education courses for the students majoring in preschool education, but all courses are elective courses, and relevant courses are offered from sophomore year onwards, regardless of grade, so students only choose special courses based on the arrangement of courses per semester and their own free time. In view of this, this study attempts to explore the shortcomings of the curriculum construction of inclusive education in colleges and universities by investigating the situation of preschool students taking special education courses, and puts forward corresponding suggestions and opinions.

2. Research Methods and Materials

2.1 Research Object

The freshmen, sophomores and juniors of preschool education major in a university in Sichuan province were selected as the research objects. The questionnaires were collected on the spot. Researchers as the main subjects adopted the unified measurement instruction and conducted group measurement. According to the validity of the questionnaires, 30 were for sophomores, 32 for juniors and 25 for seniors.

2.2 Questionnaire Design

Based on the collection and analysis of the existing literature, a questionnaire was designed, which included basic information, students' reflection on the special education curriculum, students' specific understanding and evaluation of special education curriculum and their future career.

3. Research Results

3.1 Special Education Elective courses for Preschool Education Major

As shown in Table 1, students majoring in pre-school education have significantly difference from the rest of the courses in the three elective courses of special education, namely, Montessori Education, Special Psychology in Preschool and Practice in Special Education Bases. Students in the three grades choose Montessori Education at most and Introduction to Special Education at the least. As for the elective course of Montessori Education, there is a significant difference between Grade 2 and Grade 3 and Grade 4 ($0.000^{***}<0.001$, $0.000^{***}<0.001$), but no significant difference between Grade 3 and Grade 4 ($0.478>0.05$). As for the elective course of Special Psychology in Preschool, there is a significant difference between Grade 2 and Grade 3 and Grade 4 ($0.016^{**}<0.05$, $0.018^{**}<0.05$), and extremely significant difference between Grade 3 and Grade 4 ($0.000^{***}<0.001$). As for the elective course of Practice in Special Education Bases, only the difference between Grade 2 and Grade 4 is significant ($0.005^{**}<0.01$).

Table 1: Statistics of selections for special education courses offered in preschool education majors

	Sophomores		Juniors		Seniors		F
	Number of students	Percentage	Number of students	Percentage	Number of students	Percentage	
Introduction to Special Education	0	0%	2	6%	0	0%	1.830
Montessori Education	18	60%	30	94%	25	100%	12.367***
Inclusive Education	3	10%	4	13%	3	12%	0.050
Diagnosis of Special Children	2	7%	2	6%	1	4%	0.098
Individualized Education	5	17%	5	16%	4	16%	0.006
Special Psychology in Preschool	14	47%	6	19%	19	76%	11.470***
Early Intervention	5	17%	6	19%	3	12%	0.235
Theory and Practice of Rehabilitation	1	3%	5	16%	5	20%	1.938
Correction of Speech Disorders	3	10%	3	9%	1	4%	0.382
Basic Sign Language	5	17%	3	9%	1	4%	1.197
Basis of Braille	2	7%	2	6%	1	4%	0.098
Practice in Special Education Bases	10	33%	5	16%	1	4%	4.298*

Note: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$, the same below

3.2 Ways for Students Majoring in Preschool Education to Acquire Knowledge of Special Education

As shown in Table 2, there are significant differences between the three ways for preschool education majors to acquire special education knowledge, such as report exchange meeting, video viewing and self-study and other ways, among which students of three grades choose to watch video at the most and report exchange meeting at the least to acquire special education knowledge. In terms of participation in the report exchange meeting, there are extremely significant differences between Grade 4 and Grades 2 and 3 ($0.001^{***} < 0.001$, $0.000^{***} < 0.001$). As for viewing videos, there are significant differences between Grade 4, Grades 2 and 3 ($0.019^* < 0.05$, $0.025^* < 0.05$). In terms of self-study of special education knowledge, there are significant differences between Grade 4 and Grades 2 and 3 ($0.041^* < 0.05$, $0.007^{**} < 0.01$). At the same time, only Grade 2 and Grade 4 have significant difference in reading special education publications ($0.029^* < 0.05$).

Table 2: Statistics of ways for pre-school students to acquire knowledge of special education

	Sophomores		Juniors		Seniors		F
	Number of students	Percentage	Number of students	Percentage	Number of students	Percentage	
Preschool education curriculum	8	27%	11	34%	13	52%	1.966
Participating in special education probation activities	10	33%	5	16%	9	36%	1.852
Participating in special education report exchange	4	13%	4	12%	13	52%	8.664***
Reading special education publications	6	20%	11	34%	12	48%	2.472
Watching special education videos	23	77%	25	78%	25	100%	3.534*
Learning special education knowledge by oneself	9	30%	7	22%	14	56%	4.044*

3.3 Students' Understanding and Evaluation of Special Education Courses in Preschool Education Major

Table 3: Statistics of preschool students' willingness to learn special education courses

	Sophomores		Juniors		Seniors		F
	Number of students	Percentage	Number of students	Percentage	Number of students	Percentage	
Willing to learn	21	70%	23	72%	20	80%	0.375
Setting it as elective	27	90%	23	72%	25	100%	5.387**

As shown in Table 3, students majoring in preschool education are consistent in their willingness to take special education courses, without significant difference among the three grades. At the same time, preschool education majors' willingness to set up special education courses is significantly different. From the perspective of setting categories, students tend to set the courses as elective courses, among which Grade 3 is significantly different from Grade 2 and Grade 4 ($0.034^* < 0.05, 0.002^* < 0.05$), while Grade 2 and Grade 4 are not significantly different ($0.267 > 0.05$).

Table 4: Statistics of preschool students' willingness to engage in special education-related work

	Sophomores	Juniors	Seniors	F	Significance
Willingness to engage in special education-related work	8	6	22	1.784	0.174

As shown in Table 4, there is no significant difference in the willingness of preschool education majors to engage in preschool special education, and they all tend not to engage in related work without significant difference among the three grades.

Table 5: Statistics of preschool students' understanding of special education courses promoting teachers' professional development

	Sophomores	Juniors	Seniors	F	Significance
Knowledge is important	22	24	24	2.788	0.067
Skill is important	18	17	15	0.190	0.828

As shown in Table 5, there is no significant difference in preschool students' understanding of special education courses to promote their major development. On the promotion of knowledge, there are significant differences between Grade 4 and Grades 2 and 3 ($0.035^* < 0.05$, $0.047^* < 0.05$), but no significant difference among the three grades in promoting skills.

4. Analysis

4.1 Differences in Curriculum Cognition among Students of Different Grades

Students in different grades have significant differences in the ways to get special education knowledge and in choosing special education courses. First of all, from the perspective of the ways for students to acquire special education knowledge, the data in Table 2 proves that senior students are more inclined to acquire special education knowledge through three ways: report meeting, watching videos and self-study compared with sophomores and juniors. That is to say, while attaching importance to communication with special education experts and peers, self-study awareness is still strong, especially in self-reading, which is closely related to the state that students need to take the initiative to find jobs or go to higher schools at this stage.

Secondly, from the perspective of the selection of a single course, the data in Table 1 shows that students in three grades take Montessori Education at the most and Introduction to Special Education at the least, which shows that on the one hand, students have a clear goal and tend to take the special education courses that are most closely related to preschool education; on the other hand, they have limitations in their cognition of special education courses, because Introduction to Special Education is not only a basic course for special education majors, but also a core course for inclusive education. At the same time, with the grade increasing, the number of students who take the Practice in Special Education Bases decreases. Combined with the data in Table 2, it can be further observed that the learning behavior of senior students tends to static knowledge accumulation, but they lack interest and willingness in dynamic learning.

4.2 Differences in the Willingness of Students in Different Grades

Students of different grades have significant differences in their willingness to engage in works related to special education. The data in Table 3 show that the students in the three grades have a strong desire to learn special education courses, but the expected learning depth is inconsistent, which may be caused by two reasons: First, the students generally believe that special education courses should supplement the knowledge of pre-school courses and broaden their horizons, so they tend to set them as elective courses. Secondly, by comparing the differences among different grades, it is found that the largest number of junior students think that special education courses should be set as compulsory courses, which may reflect that they are more mature in thinking and stronger in learning willingness than sophomores. Moreover, compared with senior students, they are in a relatively pure professional cognition level and have not been excessively affected by the pressure of employment and entering a higher school.

This view is further supported by the data in Table 5. The data show that all the students in the three grades think that the promotion of special education curriculum to teachers' professional development is mainly concentrated on the level of knowledge, and the difference in understanding of the importance of special education curriculum is the largest among the junior students. In the meantime, the ambiguity of the cognition of the three grades in professional development essentially reflects the tendency of students' static learning.

5. Discussions

5.1 Student-Centred, Grade-Based Curriculum Design and Implementation

Under the background of inclusive education, the orientation of pre-school education talents training needs to be adjusted, and the implementation of talents training scheme will finally return to the curriculum system itself. Therefore, curriculum system reconstruction and teaching organization reform have become the core theme of inclusive education teacher training.

First of all, the orientation adjustment of personnel training is bound to cause the change of students' learning style. Whatever the discipline relationship between pre-school education and special education is handled by the major, students' learning always emphasizes autonomy, while classroom teaching emphasizes generativity. Therefore, teachers need to teach the knowledge of special education disciplines, and at the same time, actively carry out the skills and strategies courses of inclusive education, highlighting the practical value of the courses on the one hand, and construct inclusive education courses from the knowledge connotation to promote students' in-depth learning on the other hand. Some scholars believe that it is necessary to provide joint courses for inclusive teachers, including professional ideas, professional knowledge, professional skills and professional care^[4].

Secondly, in view of the different learning situations of students in different grades, on the one hand, one or two compulsory courses of special education should be set up based on grade differences and course difficulty, and the recommended list of elective courses should be provided by grade. In the course learning process of infiltrating the concept of integrated education, students' needs should be closely combined to actively guide course cognition and broaden their professional horizons. On the other hand, in the form of teaching organization, attention should be paid to students' practice, so as to increase their contact and connection with children with special needs. Through active learning forms such as probation in regular classes and interviews with teachers in special schools, students' understanding of the concept of inclusive education, as well as their understanding and perception of methods and techniques should be promoted.

5.2 Discussion on the Integrated Curriculum System of Preschool Education from the Perspective of Inclusive Education

Inclusive education teachers, the new type of teachers in the context of inclusive education, refer to teachers who can cope with the needs of diversified students, including special children's special educational needs, in the ordinary classroom.^[5] With this talent training orientation, the curriculum system needs to be optimized or even reorganized. Joint curriculum belongs to the reorganization mode of curriculum system in essence, while the curriculum system of this research object belongs to the optimization mode.^[6] Regardless of the curriculum system adopted, the curriculum of inclusive education teachers needs to be both academic and teacher-oriented, which is supported by the data of the course selection of *Special Psychology in Preschool* (Table 1). According to the statistics, the number of junior students who take this course is the least because, as mentioned above, they have a clear professional cognition and a pure learning state, which reflects the fact that

the course content should not only strengthen the knowledge depth in one way, but also provide students with learning tasks to solve problems based on actual problems. On the one hand, it can improve their problem-solving awareness and hands-on ability, on the other hand, it can deepen the understanding of professional knowledge in practice.^[7] However, it is precisely because the course *Special Psychology in Preschool* is slightly insufficient in promoting the transformation of students' actual ability, which leads to the least number of junior students taking this course.

In the United States, the training of inclusive teachers is jointly undertaken by multiple colleges or majors, i.e., students majoring in general education take special education courses, non-special education majors take special education as a second major, and a special inclusive education major^[8] is established through professional integration. The first form is adopted by the research object in this study, but there are many deficiencies in the depth of curriculum content, interdisciplinary integration, and integration of theory with practice. This brings enlightenment that preschool education major not only needs to carry out teaching reform around the curriculum construction, but also needs to improve the integration ability of professional resources, and provides students with adequate learning resources and practice platform through the linkage of special education major, institution and school.

True integration is the substitution of a monistic educational system for a general-special dualistic educational system^[9]. The author believes that the macro topic of inclusive education is not only an introduction to the adjustment of pre-school education professional talent training mechanism, but also a key measure for the whole education system to make changes to support the development of special needs groups. Although this study focuses on the pre-service training system for pre-school teachers, and the data obtained are also insufficient, the study has changed from focusing solely on general education to thinking about the training of talents in existing general education from the perspective of integrated education, which is not only a change in research perspective, but also a starting point for the implementation of the integration policy. At the same time, fortunately, on August 28, 2019, some special education institutions in Beijing, together with Haidian Modern Art Kindergarten in Beijing, Pre-school Education College of Nanjing Normal University of Special Education, Beijing Preschool Education Association, etc., jointly issued the first relevant standard of preschool inclusive education in China, namely, the *Guide for Teachers' Ability Training in Preschool Inclusive Education*.

6. Conclusion

In the follow-up study, this standard will be used as the framework for further thinking and discussion on the training of pre-school education professionals. Accordingly, researchers in this field can also further explore the curriculum implementation and improvement under the perspective of inclusive education from the perspective of special and general education integration, centering on the talent cultivation model of neighboring majors, such as primary education, and relying on the reconstruction of its curriculum system or even a certain curriculum.

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