

# Under the Perspective of Inclusive Education: the Development of Special Education in China

Xinyuan Lu<sup>1,\*</sup>

*1 Institute of Education, University of London, United Kingdom, WC1H 0AL, London*

*\*Corresponding Author*

**ABSTRACT.** *Educational equality is one of the core and hot issues in current international education circles. The study and emphasis on educational fairness is a symbol of social civilization and progress, which reflects the concern and safeguard of the world over the right to education of vulnerable groups. The purpose of this article is to explore the development and progress of Chinese special education under the impetus of this global education. Based on the reference of the development of inclusive education in the United Kingdom and its legislative experience, this article explores the relationship between educational equity and Chinese special education legislation, and how to guarantee the equality of the right to education for the people with special needs.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Inclusive and integrative education; Special education; Educational equality*

## 1. Introduction

In the age of knowledge economy, education plays a crucial role and promotes the political, economic, cultural and social development of a country or a nation. In addition, education also plays an important role in personal growth as it relates to personality and quality of life. Education as a basic human right refers to education that is covered by human rights, including the right to education and equal opportunities of education, regardless of race, belief, class, gender, region or educational attainment. The right to education is the core of 'education as a human rights' and one of the necessary conditions for human to pursue the ideal life. To protect the right to education is as important as guaranteeing the ideal life of a man. Traditional liberalism argues that education is the private domain and government should not intervene and interfere too much [1].

Spring J (2008, 214), a scholar of the United States, made a profound point of view on this issue, 'it can be said that in today's world, a certain level of education is a necessary condition for human behavior, so it is the most important human right'

[2]. Many sociologists agree that education is the main cause of social mobility and social stratification, and it is an effective way to improve the disadvantaged situation of disabled people. Instead of providing disadvantaged groups on daily life necessities, it is better to meet the requirements of individual and their children to accept education, it can improve their ability to make a living and take into account the dignity of human nature. In addition, the most effective way to aid the disabled people is to provide opportunities for them to acquire new knowledge and skills, and to encourage them to obtain more job opportunities. Because of this, the relationship between education and human rights is more closely linked. Education derives from the basic human rights that people should be protected and is the best way to make human beings have dignity [3]. Therefore, treating education as a human right is part of the social rights in the classification of human rights. Article 26 of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 stipulated that 'Everyone has the right to education. Education should be free, at least in the primary and basic education stages'. The 1960 General Conference of UNESCO adopted The International Convention on Discrimination in Education that 'any form of discrimination in education should be banned and equality of opportunity and equal treatment for all must be promoted'. As we look at the developmental history of special education and human rights, we can easily find out that special education has been closely linked with the respect and protection of basic human rights at the beginning, which illustrates the level of development of a social civilization.

This essay is divided into five parts. The first section introduces the background of special education, in relation to human rights, the right to education. The second part analyzes the current situation and significance of inclusive education in the UK. The third part explores the development of special education in China, reviews the history and the achievements. The fourth part introduces the historical process and legislative features of the development of special education legislation in the United Kingdom, summarizes the advanced experience and give some reference to the legislation of special education in China.

## **2. Integrative and Inclusive Education in the Uk**

The Special Education Advisory Committee of the United Kingdom proposed the Warnock Report (1978), which introduced the idea of special educational needs (SEN), 'statements' of SEN, and an 'integrative' that later became known as 'inclusive' [7]. Moreover, it considered various learning difficulties for special children, for example, a resource center should be set up in each ordinary school to provide education to needs of special children at some specific time. The Warnock Report (1978) suggested that inclusive education should be conducted at different levels according to the actual needs of special children. It can be divided into site inclusion, social inclusion and functional inclusion. The so-called site inclusion is the special children learning in ordinary schools, but not into ordinary classes, which means they are in special classes of ordinary schools and special teachers take responsible for the teaching of special children; social inclusion refers to special children attending ordinary schools, to study some art classes in ordinary classes at a

specific time while the rest are taught in special classes or specialized resource classrooms; functional inclusion is to make special children, like ordinary children, to be members of ordinary classes, and ordinary and special teachers to meet the learning needs of special children. The Warnock Report (1978) emphasized that general education should be combined with special education, proposed to change the isolated educational status of the traditional and fixed, and opened the door to the British policy on inclusive education [4].

Since the beginning of the practice of inclusive education in Britain, special children in the United Kingdom has drawn public concern. Special children are no longer separated from education in special education schools. Instead, they start to enter general schools. Special and ordinary children learn together, play games and participate in various activities, and get the full attention of teachers in ordinary schools. Ordinary and special teachers together to develop special education programs for disabled children and according to the learning needs of special children take appropriate teaching strategies in the teaching process. For example, for special children with hearing impairment, teachers use methods to teach such as drawing, presenting pictures, watching videos and so on. For special children with visual disabilities, they adopt methods of listening to stories and touching real things. After continuous exploration and practice, special education for children in the United Kingdom has been valued and improved, and great progress has been made in the inclusive education [5].

Inclusive education argues that both special children and normal children have the same right to education. Schools must find ways to meet the needs of each child, therefore, inclusive education is in fact a concern and guarantee for every child's right to education. The practice of implementing segregated education for special children is actually a kind of discrimination and exclusion, which will affect the growth of these special children. Thus, it is consistent with inclusive education proposes that schools should meet the requirements of every child and the children's right to education, and they all embody the idea of human rights. As a policy of changing social exclusion and safeguarding human rights, the United Kingdom has adopted inclusive education as a mean to ensure that all students have equal educational opportunities. In their view, both normal students and special children have the right to equal education in ordinary schools and children with special needs do not need to be isolated or over-protected. The differences in the social environment on the development of special children in all aspects should be completely accommodated, rather than allowing them to be taken care of only by people.

In order to ensure the implementation of inclusive education, the United Kingdom has enacted various legal provisions to protect them. The British government has mainly directed and regulated many legislations about the development of inclusive education which include the Warnock Report (1978), the Education Law (1981), the Education Reform Law (1988), the Education Law (1993), Implementation Regulation of Appraisal and Assessment of Special Education Needs (1994), Anti-disability Discrimination Act (1995), Green Paper on Special Education (1997), Special Education Implementation Charter (2001) and so

on. These education policies are guaranteed and promoted through the form of legislation, which has greatly promoted the implementation and development of inclusive education [9].

Furthermore, the British government has given massive financial support to the development of inclusive education. For instance, they provided sufficient special funds for schools to carry out inclusive education and thus help enhance the ability of ordinary schools to receive students with special needs. The government supported an inclusive education project from 50,000 to 250,000 pounds. In addition to providing financial support for the project, the United Kingdom also funded ordinary schools to establish inclusive schools. The government has taken measures to gradually reduce special schools and increase the number of inclusive schools. According to a survey, by 2010, only one special school was reserved in some parts of Britain. However, in January 2000, more than 100 schools created inclusive schools in the UK [4].

More importantly, many universities are actively involved in training special teachers of applying to inclusive education courses. The British government requires all teachers to carry out pre-service training, and they should learn special education knowledge and related skills. The special education courses become a necessary course for obtaining British teachers qualifications. During the practice of inclusive education, teachers further understand the learning needs of special children as well. The cooperation and communication between ordinary teachers and special teachers enable both to learn from each other and the ability of inclusive education continues to improve. This is also an important guarantee for the implementation of inclusive education in the UK.

### **3. The Development of Special Education in China**

Since ancient times, the Chinese nation had an excellent tradition of respecting eldest, caring for the child, helping the weak and disabled. Many years ago, some of the sages in China mentioned the ideal of supporting all eldest, child, weak and disabilities. It is not difficult to find out from ancient China's philosophical concepts and moral principles that the ancient Chinese were broadly in favor of the disabled. For example, Rites of Zhou, Local, Disciples (mid-second century BC) recorded that there were administrative measures relating to mercy, pension, poverty-relief, peace and prosperity. Moreover, from Confucius' morality to Mozi's all-embracing love, all permeated the simple humanitarian thought of poverty-relief and helping the disabled in Chinese traditional culture.

China's special education was born in the mid-19th century. In 1859, Hong Renxuan, one of the leaders of the late Taiping movement, proposed in his Policy New Deal that establishing a school for disabled people who are blind and deaf; the rich people bear the expenses and the poor give their strength; hiring teachers to teach them skills so that they are not useless. Due to the failure of the Taiping movement, this claim was not implemented.

The formal establishment of Chinese disabled education, the first blind school

was the Qiming Blind School, started by the British pastor William in Peiping (now Beijing) in 1874. The first deaf-mute school was the Qiming School established by Charlie Mills, an American missionary, in Dengzhou (now Penglai County), in 1887 and is now the Yantai deaf-mute school. In 1916, Zhang Shuai, an industrialist, founded the first private blind and deaf school in Nantong city, Jiangsu Province. Under the influence of these pioneers of special education, deaf-mute schools and blind children schools have been run by more than 20 cities such as Baoding, Hangzhou, Nantong, Shaoxing and so on. These schools were quite difficult to set up at the beginning of their operation, however, most of them are still struggling to persevere. Since the previous Chinese governments did not attach importance to the education of disabled people, coupled with the years of war, disabled children were unable to go to school. At that time, special education was developing highly slowly. By 1949, there were only 42 blind and deaf schools in China, about 2,000 students (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China 2012).

After the founding of New China in 1949, the Central People's Government Administration Council promulgated the Decision on Reforming the Schools, clearly stipulating that People's governments at all levels should set up special schools such as deaf, blindness and so on, and educate children, young persons and adults with physical impairments. In 1953, the Ministry of Education established a blind, deaf and dumb education office, which was responsible for formulating plans and training teachers and guiding the work of blind and deaf-mute education throughout the country.

In the past decade, with the progress of the country and the economic development, the status of disabled people has been significantly improved. A total of 9.9 million disabled people, including more than one third of disabled children have received varying degrees of rehabilitation. By the end of 1998, inclusive education in ordinary schools has become the major form of compulsory education for disabled children, and the enrollment rate of blind, deaf and mentally disabled children has reached 64.3%. Vocational education and training have achieved initial success as well, for example, from 1993 to 1998, a total of 890,000 disabled people received training of different degrees. Secondary and advanced education for disabled people also made gratifying progress, for instance, established the blind high schools and deaf high schools; and started Changchun University-Institute of Special Education, Binzhou Medical College, Tianjin Institute of Technology-Institute of Deaf People; these are three specialized institutions for the recruitment of disabled students. The number of children with special needs in preschool, compulsory and vocational education increased from less than 6% in 1987 to more than 70% in 2000, and the education chain of preschool, compulsory, vocational and higher education for children with special needs has been formed (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China 2012).

#### **4. Equal Rights to Education for Special Children: a Comparative Analysis**

After the British Labour Party regained power in 1974, it began legislative reform on the restructuring education, and introduced a new bill in 1969, which

formed the 1976 Education Act. Moreover, the new bill added six provisions, one of which (the tenth of the bill) supported disabled children to enter ordinary schools. This is the first time in the British education legislation to protect the right to disabled children accessing to the ordinary schools [9].

The Warnock report, published in 1978, proposed the idea of integrative education, believed that most of children should be enrolled in ordinary schools and require ordinary schools to provide effective special education for children with special need [1]. In 1981, the Education Act was a milestone in Britain's progress from separate provision of education for children with special needs to the integrative education and to inclusive education. For example, the 1981 Education Act officially recognized the concept of special education needs, and replaced the old classifications of disability; apart from that, it abolished the old regulations that gave special care to special schools and introduced the evaluation and identification of special needs for the purpose of stalemating; furthermore, it detailed the specific rights and procedures for parents to participate in the education of disabled children [8].

Since then, the 1993 Education Act emphasized that all schools must develop special education policies and establish an education working system for identifying and promoting children with special education needs. In 1994, the ministry of education in the UK issued the Special Education Requirements Identification and Evaluation Charter, which indicated the expectation of the successful implementation of the inclusive education for the school and local education authorities. In addition, the British Parliament passed a bill to protect disabled people against discrimination in 1995, thereby for the first time linking special education needs to legal equality.

In contrast, China's special education legislation started relatively late, and it started to develop really in the 1980s. For example, Article 45 of the Constitution of the People's Republic of China formulated at the Fifth Session of the Fifth National People's Congress in December 1982 stipulated that "the state and society should help disabled citizens to employment, life, and education". This is the first time that special education for disabled people is stipulated in the fundamental law of the country.

In addition, some terms of the existing laws and regulations of special education in China are vague, more principled statements, and operability is not strong. Some words such as 'encourage' have become quite common, as a result, the operability of the law has been greatly reduced, with low authority and mandatory. For example, Article 8 of the Regulations on Education for Disabled People (2017) stipulates that families with disabled people should help disabled people to receive education. However, such flexible regulations will possibly bring about practical difficulties in operation and supervision. Furthermore, some parents of disabled children will not allow their children to receive education, because they think that to receive education is useless, although the government provides free compulsory education for them. Taking my classmate in primary school as an example, he was a disable child with dumb, after he completed six-years compulsory education, his parents

required he returned to hometown to take care of his little brothers and sisters which can help his parents relieve pressure, therefore he cannot receive education although the government provides opportunities.

Through the above introduction and analysis, can be seen that Britain promotes the realization of the equal rights of disabled children by legislation and parliament. Policy constantly was revised to meet the needs of the development as well as the appeal and active advocacy of parents also play an indispensable role in seeking equal access to education for disabled children. However, there are also many problems with special education in Britain. For example, Britain's attitude towards special education system in the practice of implementing inclusive education was exclusive and superseded, that is from the extreme of totally relying on special education to the other extreme of completely replacing special education. It means that the relationship between special education and inclusive education did not correctly address, and the relationship between inclusive education and special education should not be antagonistic. Instead, they should complement, cooperate, and coordinate each other. By integrating the resources of both to serve special children that will acquire better educational effect [1].

Moreover, in the process of implementing inclusive education in the United Kingdom, government has taken many measures to provide the minimal restricted environment for special children. However, due to differences in perceptions and concepts, the understanding of inclusive education in different regions and schools is not the same. For instance, the inclusive education is conducted only in non-academic subjects in some schools; and the education needs of special children are meted through the adjustment of curriculum layout and teaching mode in other schools; and even some schools change the evaluation criteria and methods for special children to implement the inclusion. Whatever the school adopts, it is only an integration in certain aspects. It does not delve into all the elements that can be integrated and does not achieve full integration in the education process, instead, it is excessively superficial and formal. Therefore, the degree of inclusion needs to be deepened.

Ultimately, although the United Kingdom achieved inclusive education, but the effect of integration is difficult to measure because of the lack of objective evaluation criteria. After years of practice, some scholars in the education field of the UK think that inclusive education is rather conducive to special children. However, quite a few scholars argue that inclusive education not only does not have obvious effect on the education of special children, but also influences the education effect of ordinary children. Therefore, various criteria and mechanisms for evaluating the effect of inclusive education need to be further developed to promote the development of inclusive education.

## References

- [1] F. Armstrong and L. Barton (1999). Disability, human rights and education: Cross cultural perspectives. McGraw-Hill Education (UK).

- [2] J. Spring (2012). *Wheels in the head: Educational philosophies of authority, freedom, and culture from Confucianism to human rights*. Routledge.
- [3] S. J. Ball (2013). *Foucault and education: Disciplines and knowledge*. Routledge.
- [4] F. Armstrong (2007). *Disability, education and social change in England since 1960*. *Hist. Educ.*, vol. 36, no. 4-5, pp. 551-568.
- [5] S. J. Ball, Foucault (2012). *Power and education*. Routledge.
- [6] M. Foucault (1980). *Power/knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings*. Vintage, pp.1972-1977.
- [7] S. Vehmas, N. Watson (2014). *Moral wrongs, disadvantages, and disability: a critique of critical disability studies*. *Disabil. Soc*, vol. 29, no. 4, pp. 638-650.
- [8] J. Allan (2010). *The sociology of disability and the struggle for inclusive education*. *Br. J. Sociol. Educ*, vol. 31, no. 5, pp. 603-619.
- [9] F. Armstrong, P. Sahoo (2011). *Disability, policy and education: Contrasting perspectives from India and England*, Routledge.