Brief Note

Special Education Assurance System in Mainland China: Status, Problems and Strategies

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Assurance system is a prerequisite and the foundation of special education development. The purpose of this paper is to introduce the assurance system of special education in Mainland China. At present, Mainland China has set up better assurance systems including management and service institutions, policy and law systems, financial system, teacher education, and evaluation system. However, further development is required for the management mechanism and legal system, financial investment, training system of special education teacher, and evaluation system of special education. Thus, it is very important to further improve the assurance system of special education in Mainland China in the future.

Key Words: assurance system, special education, Mainland China

Introduction

Special education in Mainland China originated from Qiming-Gumu School for the blind children in Beijing in 1874, whose name is now Beijing Blind School, and Dengzhou Deaf School set up in 1887. Before 1949, the church was the main founder of special education in China (Guo, 2007), which involved religious, vocational courses (Zheng, 2014). During the 30-year reform and opening to the world from 1978, China has set up higher-quality special education system.

Assurance system consists of an integral special education management, policy and law, finance and evaluation; and it is a prerequisite and the foundation of special education development. At present, the scholars are mainly involved in management mechanism, laws or policies, financial investment, and teacher training of special education in Mainland China. However, there is still no comprehensive analysis of special education assurance system in Mainland China. The paper is to comprehensively reflect on assurance system of special education in Mainland China.

Status of Assurance System of Special Education in Mainland China

With development of special education, Mainland China has set up higher-quality assurance system of special education.

Top-down management mode of special education. Management institutions are the organizations that assure special education. At present, Mainland China has set up a top-down management mechanism regarding special education.

First, administrative power of special education is mainly concentrated in the Ministry of Education in Mainland China. Central government drafts and publishes laws and policies including purpose, curricular plans and standards, and supervises the management behaviors of local governments in special education.

Second, hierarchical management in special education triggers down from province to city to county. Local governments including Departments of Education in provinces, cities and counties mainly determine the daily management of basic special education including preschool, elementary, and secondary special education.
Third, there are a lot of rehabilitation and service institutions of special education in Mainland China. Investigation showed that by the end of 2014, the number of rehabilitation institutions reached 6,914 in Mainland, 31 provincial-level institutions for hearing and verbal rehabilitation were established, and 1,025 more covering smaller administrative areas. The number of institutions providing rehabilitation and training services for persons with physical disability reached 2,181, including 42 provincial-level and another 2,139 at the city or county levels. The number of institutions providing rehabilitation and training services to persons with intellectual disability reached 1,730, and 41 provincial-level autism rehabilitation institutions were established, and 20,000 children with autism were served (China Disabled Person’s Federation, 2015).

A set of laws and policies in special education. Laws and policies systematically assures special education and set the behavior standards. At present, Mainland China has set up a more thorough legal system of special education.


Multiple financial investments in special education. Educational investment is the financial security and material foundation of special education development. At present, Mainland China has spent a large amount of money to improve the infrastructure and institutional environment of special education.

On the one hand, more and more funding is invested in special education. Funding for special education in Mainland China mainly includes fiscal investment (more than 97 percent), social donations (less than 1 percent) and tuition fees (decreasing very quickly because of free compulsory special education) (Tian, Zhang, Guo, & Zhong, 2015). Investigation shows that total education funding was 4,637.7 billion Chinese Yen (RMB) including 13.0 for special education in 2001, and 32,806.5 including 95.9 for special education in 2014 (Fig. 1) and financial investment increased more than 7 times from 2001 to 2014.

On the other hand, infrastructure of special education in Mainland China became increasingly better. By the end of 2014, 2,231 full-service facilities at multiple levels were completed and out into use, totaling 4.6026 million square meters of servicing area. The total investment amounted to 12.864 billion RMB. Six hundred and thirteen rehabilitation facilities were completed, totaling 1.3001 million square meters, and 2.571 billion RMB were invested (China Disabled Person’s Federation, 2015).

Advanced training system for special education teacher. Teacher education is the key to training high-quality teachers for children with special needs and the human assurance of basic special education. At present, there are more and more teach-
ers with professional training on special education in Mainland universities and they have made great progress both in quantity and in quality.

Universities training special education teachers are on the increase. In 1981, the first special education teacher preparation program was established in Mainland China; and investigation showed that there were 51 universities with special education degree programs, including 49 with bachelor degree, 17 with masters degree and 4 with doctors degree in 2016 China3) (Table 1).

As a result, there are more and more special education teachers with special education diplomas. Investigation shows that the total number of full-time special education teachers increased from 28,494 in 2001 to 48,125 in 2014 and the number of full-time teachers with pre-service and in-service training for undergraduate and graduate diplomas in special education increased from 2001 to 20143) (Fig. 2).

Evaluation system ensures quality of special education. Additional quality standards have been set up to evaluate and supervise special education in Mainland China.

China has set up a more complete legal system of special education, which includes standards on assessment of special education schools, certification of children with special needs and professional development of special education teachers. Especially, Professional Standards for Special Education Teacher (2015) states basic requirements of the quality of special education teachers, which are the important

### Table 1 Number of Universities With Special Education Degree Program and Their Enrollment per Year in Mainland China

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Provinces</th>
<th>Total number of universities and enrollments per year</th>
<th>Only for bachelors program</th>
<th>Only for masters program</th>
<th>Only for doctorals program</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beijing</td>
<td>2 (111)</td>
<td>2 (98)</td>
<td>1 (10)</td>
<td>1 (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hubei</td>
<td>3 (117)</td>
<td>3 (108)</td>
<td>2 (8)</td>
<td>1 (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shanxi (North-west)</td>
<td>2 (40)</td>
<td>1 (30)</td>
<td>+1 (8)</td>
<td>+1 (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shanghai</td>
<td>1 (33)</td>
<td>1 (12)</td>
<td>1 (15)</td>
<td>1 (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shandong</td>
<td>6 (431)</td>
<td>6 (423)</td>
<td>2 (8)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sichuan</td>
<td>4 (210)</td>
<td>4 (202)</td>
<td>1 (8)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guangdong</td>
<td>4 (208)</td>
<td>4 (204)</td>
<td>1 (4)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yunnan</td>
<td>3 (166)</td>
<td>1 (163)</td>
<td>1 (3)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chongqing</td>
<td>2 (162)</td>
<td>2 (129)</td>
<td>2 (33)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhejiang</td>
<td>2 (126)</td>
<td>2 (120)</td>
<td>1 (6)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anhui</td>
<td>2 (113)</td>
<td>2 (110)</td>
<td>1 (3)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gansu</td>
<td>1 (64)</td>
<td>1 (60)</td>
<td>1 (4)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liaoning</td>
<td>1 (29)</td>
<td>1 (19)</td>
<td>1 (10)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jilin</td>
<td>2 (24)</td>
<td>1 (22)</td>
<td>+1 (2)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guizhou</td>
<td>5 (439)</td>
<td>5 (439)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hebei</td>
<td>4 (239)</td>
<td>4 (239)</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jiangsu</td>
<td>1 (230)</td>
<td>1 (230)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henan</td>
<td>1 (100)</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fujian</td>
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<td>1 (93)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Neimenggu</td>
<td>2 (72)</td>
<td>2 (72)</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Xinjiang</td>
<td>1 (52)</td>
<td>1 (52)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Heilongjiang</td>
<td>1 (52)</td>
<td>1 (52)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guangxi</td>
<td>1 (35)</td>
<td>1 (35)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tianjin</td>
<td>1 (30)</td>
<td>1 (30)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>51 (3176)</td>
<td>49 (3042)</td>
<td>15+2 (122)</td>
<td>4 (12)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. 1. The number in brackets means student enrollment in 2016. 2. There are two universities with master degree without bachelor degree. 3. There is no bachelor, master or doctor degree in Shanxi (North China); Jiangxi (East China); Hunan (Middle China); Hainan (South China); Xizang (South-west); Qinghai and Ningxia (North-west).
basis of pre-service and in-service training, qualification and assessment of special education. In the meantime, evaluation theory and modern information technology are introduced to special education in order to enhance the evaluation effect of special education. For example, the Discrepancy/Consistency Model for Specific Learning Disability Identification, based on the PASS theory and measured by the Cognitive Assessment System, is used to assess the cognitive process of children to diagnose whether they have learning disabilities and provide scientific evidence for targeted interventions (Sun & Tong, 2014); the psychological assessment of the children with special needs may provide a basis for identification of the children with special needs, education replacement, individualized education planning, education quality monitoring and the fair and appropriate education (Wei, 2006); and modern science and technology enrich the educational methods and enhance the effect of certification, rehabilitation and education of children with disabilities (Lei & Zhu, 2014).

Problems of the Assurance System of Special Education in Mainland China

Reflecting on the status of special education, there still are problems with the assurance system in Mainland China as described below.

Incomplete management mechanism of special education. First, Responsibilities and duties in special education are not clear between central and local governments. On the one hand, in the process of special education management, there exists generalized administrative power, poor service awareness and expansive administrative institutions in China (Zhang, 2013). On the other hand, without an independent management department or professional manager, the quality of special education management is poor and has prevented the development of special education (Liang, 2009).

Second, the social support system of special education is incomplete. At present, China has not set up a complete social support system for special education, and special education is still short of support from families, community, individuals, and basic special education. Special education teachers and children with special needs have low social identity (Zhang, 2014). On the other hand, support provided at each level does not meet the demands of those families. There is still no smooth communication channel between supporting resources and those being supported (Huang & Liu, 2006).

Incomplete legal system of special education. Although a set of laws and policies on special education had been set up in China, the legal system is still incomplete. First, the legal level is lower and there is still no independent law for special education (Li, 2015a). Second, laws and policies about special education are short of systematization and operability, the legal content and objects are too narrow (Li, 2012), and there are no strict and specific evaluation and certification standards about special education needs, special education teachers, and special education schools (Kang & Lei, 2012). Third, some laws and policies are short of innovation (Lei, 2015).

Insufficient financial investment in special education needs. Although there are more and more financial investment in special education, money and infrastructure of special education still cannot meet the increasingly diverse special education needs in China.

On the one hand, the total quantity of special education funding is not enough. Statistics shows that, approximately, the ratio of special education investment to total education investment is less than 0.4 percent\(^1\) (Fig. 1) and the total quantity and ratio is

![Fig. 2 Educational Background of Full-time Teachers for Basic Special Education in 2001–2014 Mainland China](http://www.moe.edu.cn/s78/A03/moe_560/moe_568/moe_583/201002/n20100226_10576.html)
still much less than other educational fields during 2001–2014 China.

On the other hand, there are some investment imbalances in different regions and fields. For example, there is usually less financial investment in non-compulsory education (including preschool and senior secondary special education), west and rural and poor-economic regions (Peng, 2013); especially, special education schools in western rural regions have much less financial investment and poorer infrastructure and environment.

**Imperfect training system for special education teacher.** There are few high-quality special education teachers. At present, there is still a high demand for special education teachers, who are increasing gradually but unsteadily in quantity (Peng, 2013). Investigation shows that although there are more and more teachers in each special education school with higher and higher teacher-student ratio\(^1\) (Fig. 3), they are less than other developed countries and cannot meet special education needs for the children (Lei, 2015); distribution of special education teachers is imbalanced in gender (Wang, Xiao, Zhu, Wei, & Li, 2011), and there is a progressive decrease in the average proportion of female teachers in the total number of local special education schools in the eastern, western and central regions (Zhao, 2012). In the meantime, special education teachers have poorer educational background, and only 50 percent of teachers have special education diplomas or degrees (Zhang, 2014); few of them have bachelor or graduate degree\(^1\) (Fig. 2); and most of them are short of knowledge and abilities regarding special education (Lei, 2015; Wang et al., 2011).

At the same time, teacher education for children with special needs is insufficient. Investigation shows that even with an increased number of universities with special education major, the number is much less than in America (Li, 2015b) and regional distribution is unbalanced\(^2\) (Table 1). The program is too simple, content is short of pertinence and pre-service training is completely separate from in-service training (Lei & Zhu, 2014).

**Incomplete quality evaluation and certification of special education.** Although some evaluation standards of special education have been set up in China, the evaluation system and procedures are still incomplete. For example, the instrument of assessment for children with special needs is simple, not strictly operated, not localized, is only a formality and short of professionalism and continuity (Kang & Lei, 2012). The psychological assessment of children with special needs has faulty laws and regulations, lack of professionalism, disorder in the development, utilization and management of psychological assessment instrument (Wei, 2006). Evaluation methods and content are not differentiated between special education and general education (Xiao, 2015). Teacher training for integrative special education are short of legal support and assurance of quality (Li, 2013), and they are short of strict standards on supervision and evaluation of special education schools (Xu, 2008).

### Strategies of Assurance System of Special Education in Mainland China

Facing the above problems, it is very important to improve the system to assure special education in Mainland China from the following.

**Further improving the management mechanism of special education.** First, the management mechanism of special education must be improved. Division of special education should be set up in the Ministry of Education or the Department of Education in provinces, cities and counties and independently deal with daily affairs (Xu, 2008). At the same time, the responsibilities of special education management should be specified, which means strengthening the government planning at macroscopic level, stressing the leading role of education authority, and introducing competitive mechanism and accountability in special education (Wang &
Second, the quality and effectiveness of special education management must be enhanced. On the one hand, it is necessary to enhance the quality of managers of special education, who can implement humanistic special education and make everybody understand the need, be concerned for, and share basic special education (Zhang, 2008). On the other hand, by means of modern information technology, information resources database of special education should be set up (Chu, 2009).

Third, the social support system of special education must be improved. At present, one of the international trends of special education development is to transfer special education into special support education, which emphasizes lifelong support of special education (Yan & Xiao, 2015). Thus, it is necessary to set up a family-community-school-society support network (Zhao & Wang, 2013).

Further improving the legal system of special education. Facing the above-mentioned problems of the legal system, it is necessary to enhance the legal level and set up independent laws about special education with accurate and clear text. For example, Mainland China should set up more complete evaluation and certification standards about special education needs, special education teachers, and special education schools. Legal content and fields should be enriched, including special education expanded from compulsory education to college education and career education (Peng & Feng, 2015), and according to equality and justice, responsibilities and rights of different subjects should further be differentiated in special education laws and policies (Li, 2015a).

Further increasing the financial investment of special education. Based on the national situation and international experience, it is necessary to increase the investment in special education and rationalize the structure of special education expenditure (Zhao, Wang, & Wang, 2014). On the one hand, Mainland China should increase and reasonably use financial investment in special education, especially in western rural regions and non-compulsory special education. On the other hand, it is very important to improve the infrastructure of special education schools and promote the modernization and informationization of special education in order to create a learning environment without impairments (Wang, 2013).

Further improving teacher education system for children with special needs. The scale of teacher education for children with special needs should be enlarged. Investigation shows that there are about 51 universities with special education degree programs, and about 3,176 enrollment including 3,042 bachelors, 122 masters and 12 doctors in Mainland China and are unbalanced in regional distribution (Table 1); and special education teachers in rural basic schools have less chances for in-service training. It is necessary to increase the admission enrollment of special education in Chinese Mainland universities and implement various in-service training for basic special education teachers.

The effectiveness of teacher education for children with special needs should be increased. Special education needs not only quantitative but also qualitative increase of teachers. At present, there are simple focus fields, content, modes and lack of network resources on special education degree programs in some universities; and pre-service and in-service training is short of education and short of pertinence and effectiveness. Thus, it is necessary to enhance the flexibility, guidance and networking of teacher education for children with special needs in future Mainland China (Li, 2015b).

There is need for setting up lifelong teacher education for children with special needs. Lifelong education is a process of accomplishing personal, social and professional development throughout the life-span of individuals in order to enhance the quality of life of both individuals and their collectives (Dave, 1976: p. 34). If the teachers serve for basic special education in their life span, they will need lifelong professional development and have to share lifelong teacher education integrated pre-service with in-service training. Thus, Mainland China should build a lifelong system of professional training for basic special education teachers (Bian, Teng, & Zhang, 2012).

Further improving evaluation system of special education. With the current problems of special education, it is very important to improve the evaluation system of special education in Mainland China.

First, the legal system and management mechanism should be further improved, which involves evaluation standards, fields, procedures, rules, methods, responsibilities and rights on children with special needs, special education teachers and special education schools (Wei, 2006); and diverse evaluation subjects including administrative institutions,
schools, parents, students, community and employee in order to create open evaluation system of special education in Mainland China (Xiao, 2015).

Second, some successful evaluation theories and technology should be further introduced into special education in Mainland China. For example, student evaluation of special education in America values propriety, utility, feasibility, accuracy, flexibility and accountability (Yao, 2006), and an Alternate Evaluation may usually be used to evaluate severe cognitive disorders (Lin & Li, 2009).

Conclusion

In one word, with the 30-year reform and opening to the world, Mainland China has set up better management, laws, finances, teacher education, and quality evaluation system of special education, which have provided organization, system, finance, human and assurance of quality for special education. However, the assurance system still does not meet special education needs. Thus, it is very important to improve management mechanism and legal system, increase financial investment, reform teacher education and improve evaluation standards of special education in future Mainland China.

Endnote


References


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