The Examination of the Implementation of Learning in Regular Classes(LRC) From the Perspectives of Teachers

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ABSTRACT

The Learning in Regular Classes (LRC) , deemed as a variation of inclusive education, has been implemented for three decades in China. However, the effectiveness and success of LRC programme is being questioned in recent years due to students' low academic achievement in LRC classes. This study was designed to understand how LRC was implemented and what issues were arising from the perspectives of teachers. This study employed qualitative case study methodology. Three elementary schools were selected as sample schools. In-depth interviews with teachers, observations and documents reviews were utilised to collect the data. Guided by 'index for inclusion' ((Booth & Ainscow, 2002), findings are presented in terms of the three dimensions of cultures, policies, and practices. The findings indicate that although working in the same school, teachers' attitudes towards students with special education needs were discrepant due to their different positions, and an inclusive community has not been established. Moreover, lack of practical training, lack of parental support, unclear workload identification standard and limited curricula adaption and strategies modification have been barriers for the practice of the LRC. Meanwhile, there is consensus among all the teachers that LRC is beneficial for students with special education needs. Implications that optimise the training system for mainstream school teachers, set the criteria for workload identification and performance evaluation and further spread the idea of inclusive education are discussed.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The author is a teacher in a special education school in a large city in the east of China, where she has worked for more than ten years and is primarily responsible for English teaching. The majority of the author's students are deaf and they typically communicate with each other using sign language, while only seven years ago she became a class teacher, taking charge of a class comprising twelve students, for whom she became responsible for their performance, both in their personal lives and studies. It was then that the author met a student named Fang (a pseudonym), who was tall and could speak very clearly compared with the other students in the class. Surprisingly, he was just two years younger than the author, therefore he was at the age whereby he should have been studying in university or working in a company, yet he was sitting in this classroom. The author wondered how he had ended up studying in a vocational school at such an age, and following a lengthy conversation with his parents, the answer was found.

Initially, he had been studying in a primary school, and despite having problems with hearing and not gaining a high level of academic achievement, he nevertheless successfully graduated from that school due to his excellent performance in sports. Nonetheless, unlike primary school, junior middle school was more examination-oriented, requiring him to take more classes and he was assigned a significant amount of homework. He was frequently unable to follow his teachers' instructions due to his hearing problems, therefore they advised his mother to transfer him to a special education school, which ended up taking place. Unexpectedly, he was requested to study from the beginning of his time there, meaning that he had to sit in a classroom with grade one children. Moreover, he, again, did not have sufficient time to receive literacy education or professional training in speech; instead he took part in various kinds of sports competitions, hence he wasted six years repeating his primary school years and learned little.

In 2014, the author completed a three-month study visit in the United Kingdom, and

during that period visited an inclusive school and witnessed a rather different situation, with some children sitting in a classroom and talking freely with their classmates. The author could scarcely discern that they were deaf, just as her students were, despite them wearing hearing aids. Some students were even able to answer teachers' questions very 'clearly' and confidently with the support of teaching assistants, therefore they were fully involved in mainstream school life, which made the author contemplate why her students could not continue their studies in mainstream schools. If her students could also receive such support, students such as Fang would continue their studies in mainstream schools, causing their life to be quite different. Evidently, special education in China does not need tall buildings or high-technology multimedia equipment; rather more children need to be included in regular schools and they must be fully involved and receive appropriate support. Therefore, the author decided to carry out research to investigate the situation surrounding the implementation of Learning in Regular Classrooms (LRC) in a large city in the east of China.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

China has a tradition of caring for those with disabilities since the ancient times (Piao, 1991; Zhu, 2011), but in terms of education, this has been viewed as the privilege of the ruling class, thus most common people have not had the right to access education, not only people with disabilities (Deng & Poon-McBrayer, 2004; Pang & Richey, 2006). In the previous one hundred years, the number of common people receiving educational services has risen significantly, particularly following the Compulsory Education Act which was enacted in 1986, but 'aggregate growth does not necessarily imply fair or reasonable distribution of opportunity' (Wang, 2011, p.230). Therefore, the majority of children with disabilities did not receive equal educational opportunities until the end of the twentieth century (Lei, 2011).

The history of special education for those with disabilities in China is just over 100 years, with the inaugural schools for the blind and deaf established in 1874 and 1887 respectively (Chen, 1996), which were both founded by foreign missionaries.

Moreover, China's government did not engage in special education until the first state-run special education school was established in 1927. China has a history of more than 5000 years, while the history of special education is just over 100 years, which indicates that the right to education for people with disabilities has been widely ignored.

In the early 1990s, inclusive education was introduced into China along with the value of equality. Under the influence of inclusive education and its values, the government decided to accelerate the reform of special education by implementing legislation and regulations to ensure the rights of children with disabilities. In 2006, it revised the Compulsory Education Act and established four key measures:

Firstly, school-aged children with disabilities must have access to nine-year compulsory education; secondly, more funding should be given to special education schools and classrooms compared to mainstream schools; thirdly, schools cannot deny school-aged children under any circumstances, and as for those who have denied them, local government should compel them to take corrective actions within a set time; and fourthly, local governments should be responsible for establishing special education schools and classrooms, equipping them appropriately to meet the needs of children with disabilities. Regular schools should enrol and support students able to adapt to regular school circumstances, even if they have disabilities (Meng, Liu & Liu, 2007).

Only eight years following the revised Compulsory Education Act, *The 2014-2016 Promotion Plan of Special Education (2014-2016)* (State Council, 2014) and related documents concerning how to build resource rooms, how to offer training for regular teachers and how to support inclusive schools were issued. Evidently, the government had realised the urgency of providing educational services for students with disabilities and made great efforts to better utilise the available resources to ensure special education became more accessible and inclusive.

With the efforts of governments and schools alike, the enrollment rate of children with disabilities has increased significantly in recent times, yet the current condition

of Learning in Regular Classes (LRC) remains full of uncertainties. Qian and Jiang (2004) stated that pupils with disabilities placed in LRC have unsatisfactory performance in both academic and personal development, while Deng and Jing (2013) pointed out that despite the improvement in the school enrolment rate of students with disabilities, there has not been any discernible progress in the LRC. Most children with disabilities are simply placed in regular classes without any individualised support, causing their relegation from 'learning in regular classrooms' to 'sitting in regular classrooms' (Liu, 2007). The number of students with disabilities enrolled in regular schools fell from 64% of the total in 2007 to 49% in 2019, with one reason being unsatisfactory performance in inclusive schools (Peng, 2015; Wei, Chen & Huang, 2017; Du & Sui, 2021). Patently, in spite of the success that the LRC has achieved in enrollment rates, it has come across considerable challenges in terms of quality, hence some researchers have called for further empirical research of it (e.g. Yang & Zhang, 2018).

Therefore, this thesis carries out a qualitative study to reveal the accomplishments which some inclusive schools have made, as well as the challenges and issues they have been confronted with when implementing the LRC, ultimately making recommendations and helping these schools to better implement the LRC. The research questions are:

How is LRC understood and implemented at the school and district levels?

What are the perspectives and experiences of LRC teachers?

1.2 Significance of the Study

Learning in Regular Classes (LRC), regarded as an inclusive education model in China, has been implemented over three decades. It has proven very successful in providing greater opportunities for students with disabilities to receive educational services, particularly for those in rural areas where students are unable to access special education schools easily, yet an urgent problem remains unresolved; the inferior performance of students with special education needs in LRC classes.

Despite being in the same class as students with non-disability, only few have managed to match their academic level. Numerous factors have been identified as the reasons for this, but most studies related to the LRC have been conducted via survey. For instance, Wang (2022) investigated the current situation regarding the practice of the LRC using a survey, while Wang, Peng and Wang (2011) also conducted one to explore the factors influencing the quality of the practice of LRC. Surveys are convenient as they allow an abundance of data to be collected within a short period of time, yet a binary 'yes' or 'no' answer to the effectiveness of the practice of LRC is not sufficient. The reasons behind the phenomena must be ascertained to improve the practice of the LRC, hence applying a qualitative paradigm is preferable.

On the other hand, China's government has paid increasingly high attention to the development of special education, with the emphasis transferred from increasing the enrollment rate to enhancing the quality of teaching. Taking Jiangzhou, a large city in eastern China, as an example, in 2014 the local government began drawing up a series of plans to promote the development of LRC, which made it plain that the educational services for students with special educational needs must be improved. Moreover, an additional 6 million RMB was to be allocated annually during those years to accelerate the reform of special education in Jiangzhou. Thus, this study reviews the achievements that have been made and the issues that have arisen since this plan was implemented, and the implications based on the findings of this study will be useful for the LRC of the future.

1.3 Definitions of Key Terms

Learning in Regular Classes(LRC)

The Learning in Regular Classes (LRC) programme is considered to be a Chinese inclusive education model that seeks to include more pupils with disabilities to study with those without disabilities in local mainstream schools (Deng & Manset, 2000).

Students with disabilities

In this study, students with disabilities primarily refer to those with a disability certificate issued by the Disabled Persons Federation. This certificate covers seven categories of disabilities, namely hearing impairments, visual impairments, mental retardation, physical disabilities, speech and language disabilities, mental disorders such as autism and multiple disabilities.

Students with Special Education Needs (SEN)

The terminology of students with special education needs is widely used in western nations. Influenced by the trend of inclusive education, this terminology was introduced into China, replacing the term 'students with disabilities' in some literature and policy documents. Generally, SEN students cover a broader range than students with disabilities, refering to those with developmental difficulties in aspects such as emotion, behaviour, speech, social communication and learning, and it is usually used to describe students identified as having developmental difficulties yet study in mainstream schools.

Resource rooms

Resource rooms refer to classrooms set in regular schools which aim to offer individualised instructions to students with disabilities. These classrooms are usually equipped with resource teachers and various teaching materials, teaching aids and teaching media to provide better support for students' learning. Students tend to receive special education in this classroom within a specific time slot while learning in regular classrooms most of the time (Sun, 2013). Nowadays, to lower the sensitivity of resource rooms and raise the rate of utilisation, they are also open to students with non disability in some schools.

Resource teachers

Resource teachers should have strong foundation of psychology and education and

rich experience in teaching. On one hand, they are responsible for diagnosing students and making Individualised Educational Plans (IEPs) for target students in accordance with their learning ability in regular classes (Wang, 2005). On the other hand, they need to communicate with different parties such as students' parents, teachers, educational departments and professional staff so as to offer appropriate service for the target student.

Regular classrooms

Regular classrooms are fixed rooms for the students of one class to take lessons. In China, students are not typically required to move to different classrooms for each subject; instead teachers of different courses move to the students' fixed classroom to teach. Rooms can usually accommodate almost 50 students with a blackboard at the front and desks and chairs for the students.

1.4 Summary

This dissertation investigates the situation regarding the implementation of Learning in Regular Classes (LRC) in China from the perspective of teachers. The following five sections explore the real-life situation and the reasons behind it, namely an introduction, literature review, methodology, findings, discussion and conclusion. This chapter is the introduction section and it discusses the purpose and significance of the study, as well as providing the research questions and definitions of key terms.

Chapter 2 reviews the development of special education in China given that LRC is deemed a key aspect of special education. It also describes the complex interrelationship between the LRC and inclusive education, presenting studies on inclusive education both locally and internationally, with the intention of understanding what LRC is and how it develops from the unique culture, policies and practices that it engages with.

Chapter 3 is the methodology section, which provides the reasons for the adoption of a case study to explore the research questions, while also presenting the entire data

collection process, including how this research was conducted and the challenges which were encountered. In this chapter, the criteria of site selection, participant selection and means of obtaining access to participants and the site is explained.

Chapter 4 presents the interviews with three groups of teachers from three schools of different districts and one inspector group, with the teachers being vice-principals(administrators), class teachers and resource teachers. These three teacher types play crucial roles in the implementation of the LRC at the school level, with their attitude, knowledge and behaviour believed to be crucial to the success of inclusive education, and the descriptions of these teachers and inspectors enable an understanding of how LRC is implemented at the school level and the district level.

In chapter 5, guided by the 'index for inclusion' (Booth & Ainscow, 2002), findings are discussed from three dimensions, namely cultures, policies and practices. The findings indicate that teachers' attitudes towards students with special educational needs are at variance due to their different positions. Moreover, a lack of practical training, insufficient support from parents, unclear workload identification standards and performance evaluation standards have been barriers to the practice of LRC. The author also makes suggestions based on the 'index for inclusion', proposing that more inclusive setting-focused training should be offered, with clear workload identification standards and performance evaluation standards being built, and that spreading the value of inclusive education is necessary.

In the final chapter, the originality and limitations of this study are discussed, with suggestions outlined for further studies.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter comprises a literature review related to special and inclusive education both locally and globally and is divided into five sections. The first section focuses on the development of inclusive education internationally and pertinent issues concerning inclusive education. The second section outlines the practice and policies of special education and LRC in China, providing an overview of its development, with documents recently issued that have accelerated efforts in relation to special education, including the LRC, also discussed. Three types of documents are compared, namely national, provincial and municipal, and the unique historical and cultural context of China and the relationship between LRC and inclusive education are also addressed. The third section presents studies covering key elements in relation to the success of inclusive education, such as teachers' perceptions and preparation for it. The fourth section presents studies concerning the evaluation of the practice of the LRC and the final part discusses the conceptual framework of this study and explains why it is appropriate to its content.

2.1 Overview of Inclusive Education

2.1.1 The origins of inclusive education

Inclusive education was first coined by W. Stainback and S. Stainback in their article 'A Rationale for the Merger of Special and Regular Education'. Influenced by disability movements, a series of declarations and conventions were sanctioned by the United Nations (UN), such as the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (UNICEF, 1988), the *World Declaration on Education for All* (UNESCO, 1990) and *UN Standard Rules on the Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities* (UNESCO, 1993). In 1994, a policy document on inclusive education titled *Salamanca Statement* was issued in Salamanca, Spain, extending the ideology of 'education for all' proposed in 1990 to the concrete concept of an 'inclusive

school'.

> The fundamental principle of the inclusive school is that all children should learn together, wherever possible, regardless of any difficulties or differences they may have. Inclusive schools must recognise and respond to the diverse needs of their students, accommodating both different styles and rates of learning and ensuring quality education to all through appropriate curricula, organisational arrangements, teaching strategies, resource use and partnerships with their communities (UNESCO, 1994, p.1-12).

This stipulates that schools should accept all students regardless of any impairment affecting their body, emotions, intelligence or language. As well as the declaration, the *Framework for Action on Special Needs Education* was published, acting as the guideline for actions both at the national and international level. In total, 92 governments and 25 international organisations attended the conference and approved the declaration (UNESCO, 1997).

Once published, this statement had a significant impact internationally on special education. Many nations set inclusive education as the key objective for their development of special education (Peng & Deng, 2013; Xiong & Deng, 2013), yet in terms of its definition, inclusive education is interpreted differently depending on the context. In developing nations, it signifies more children who had previously been excluded from schools due to reasons such as disability or disease being placed in regular classrooms (Bellamy, 1999). Regarding developed nations, inclusive education entails implementing various adaptive measures of the school system to meet the diverse needs of all students, with the core principal of promoting social justice for society as a whole (Booth, Nes & Stromstad, 2003).

Moreover, many scholars have attempted to define inclusive education yet no consensus has been reached on it, with some asserting that it refers to educating children with disabilities in regular education classrooms in their local schools which predominantly enroll non-disabled students, as well as the expectation that

fundamental services and support are provided to those with disabilities (Rafferty, Boettcher and Griffin, 2001). Others have asserted that the primary objective of inclusive education is to offer 'equal', 'free' and 'appropriate' education for all (Haring et al., 1994).

2.1.2 Issues of inclusive education

Along with prompting the inclusive process, significant studies concerning inclusive education have been conducted in the last three decades. These studies can be categorised in the following manner based on their content: outcomes and interventions, with the former tending to be focused on the effectiveness of inclusive education. Fierce debate ensued around the effectiveness of inclusive education at the beginning of the 21st century, and supporters are convinced that its implementation benefits students and schools in numerous aspects (Stainback & Stainback, 1992; Villa & Thousand, 1995).

Many studies have established that in inclusive education settings children are likely to develop better social skills, attain higher academic performance and develop fewer behavioural problems than they would in segregated special education schools. Myklebuat (2002) examined 592 students with learning difficulties, placing them in regular classrooms and segregated special classrooms respectively, and after three years found that those studying in regular classes achieved better academic progress than those in segregated special classrooms. Wallace, Anderson, Bartholomay and Hupp (2002) also made positive findings, specifically that students with disabilities and those without had an equal level of academic engagement and behavioural problems in inclusive classrooms. Moreover, it has been reported that implementing inclusive education is beneficial in terms of optimising school systems, with the *2011 OECD Programme for International Student Assessment Report* (OECD, 2011) pointing out that 'many top performing schooling systems also performed well in inclusive education'. The report outlined examples, such as 'Canada dealing with immigrant children and Shanghai including the migrant children from the rural areas' (OECE, 2011, p.527).

Many issues have arisen since inclusive education has been implemented in larger areas. In many developing nations, insufficient resources, support and professional personnel have been reported as barriers to its practice (e.g. Peng, 2003; Qian and Jiang, 2004; Wang, Yang & Zhang, 2006), and in developed nations the situation has also been found to be unsatisfactory. A Dutch study did not identify any impact on 400 pairs of at-risk children (aged up to 13 years old) when placing them in regular classes and special classes (Karsten, et al., 2001). Likewise, a Swedish study investigated the self-conception of 183 children aged 9 to 3, finding no difference between those placed in mainstream schools and special schools (Allodi, 2000), with some young people simply dropping out due to their belief what was being taught at school was irrelevant to them (Ainscow, Booth & Dyson, 2006).

Inclusive education has gained popularity and is regarded as the optimal practice in terms of special education, with an increasing amount of studies conducted to investigate interventions which may lead to positive outcomes when practising inclusive education rather than questioning its effectiveness. Given that placing children in an inclusive setting is such a complex process, it involves many variations and interventions, and even a minor difference in the interpretations of these variations may affect results considerably (Lindsay, 2007).

2.2 The Policy and Practice of Special Education and Learning in Regular Classes (LRC)

To understand policies and practice related to special education and LRC in China, it is vital to comprehend the unique historical and cultural context of the nation. China has a history of more than 5000 years and its unique values, culture and tradition have shaped its modern society. In this section, both the historical and cultural context of special education and the practice and policies concerning it and LRC will be presented and discussed.

2.2.1 The historical and cultural context of special education in China

The inaugural school for people with disabilities was established in the late 19th

century by foreign missionaries. Prior to that, there were no schools for those with disabilities and this lack of consideration for special education has been attributed to Confucianism by some scholars (e.g. Mcloughlin, Zhou & Clark, 2005; Ellsworth & Zhang, 2007; Cui, 2003), who assert that it has had a negative influence on its overall development.

Being the dominant value system, Confucianism has a profound effect on every domain of social life in modern China, affecting what individuals value and shaping their behaviours. In terms of special education and LRC, the influence of Confucianism manifests itself in three key aspects: public awareness, individual rights and the examination-oriented system.

2.2.1.1 Public awareness

The core belief of Confucius was 'benevolence', namely loving and caring for people, which Piao explained as meaning that 'people respect others' parents, love others' children as their own; all the people who are bachelors, widows, orphans, singles, the disabled and the sick should be supported' (Piao, 1999, p.35). Benevolence in this sense forms part of the original Confucian philosophy that focused on maintaining harmonious relationships across society. Influenced by this, the notion of fostering a harmonious and benevolent society has been passed down and is strongly advocated in modern China, hence its people are encouraged to support vulnerable groups such as people with disabilities. Nevertheless, this form of help is not rooted in an equal relationship between people but instead mercy and sympathy shown from the strong to the weak (Xu, Cooper & Sin, 2017; Xiong & Deng, 2011). Based on the emotions of mercy and sympathy rather than the endorsement of individual rights, those with disabilities are inevitably last to be considered when limited educational resources are being distributed, which the public is more likely to take it for granted.

2.2.1.2 Individual rights

In Confucius's view, each person should be precise about their identities and roles in

their families, as well as in society as a whole, and everyone should take on responsibilities and behave in a proper fashion. These ideas specified that proper behaviour is obedience to a set hierarchy, where subjects should respect and obey rulers, sons respect and obey fathers and wives respect and obey husbands (Ellsworth & Zhang, 2007). Evidently, in this system, proper behaviour on an individual level is given significantly more weight than being able to choose individual rights (Peerenboom, 1998). Underpinned by this, the system of feudal social hierarchy was established and lasted for almost 2000 years (Chen, 1998), shaping the behaviour of people in modern China.

In modern China, the dominant value system is Collectivism, which is the combination of Marxism and Confucianism. As discussed, the latter classifies proper behaviour as obedience and loyalty to the ruling class and when it is combined with Marxism, it deems that individuals should take responsibilities as a group and obey rules while promoting the notion that the interests of the majority outweigh those of individuals (Rozman, 1991). If conflicts exist between the collective and individuals, it is expected that the latter submit or even sacrifice their own interests in order to be an obedient citizen or an obedient child. In contrast, those emphasising individual rights and freedom may be described as selfish or egoists (Xu, Cooper & Sin, 2017), and under the influence of this value, those with disabilities are not aware of their own rights in terms of gaining an education.

2.2.1.3 Examination-oriented education system

China's examination-oriented education system originates from imperial competitive examinations established during the Sui Dynasty (A.D. 581- A.D. 618) to screen out elite people potentially serving in the ruling class. Influenced by Confucianism, imperial competitive examinations encouraged excessive competition and the pursuit of academic success. These values were emphasised in ancient China and continue to play a dominant role in modern China's education system, thus the notion that studying in universities is equivalent to a positive future remains the same, and achieving high grades is the only way to gain enrolment. Therefore, the majority of parents prioritise their children's academic performance, which in turn exerts

significant pressure on teachers to offer practical instruction to improve students' academic performance. There is a greater likelihood that the diverse needs of students with disabilities or special education needs will be neglected, which may result in the unsatisfactory performance of LRC.

Moreover, implicit restrictions in imperial competitive examinations weakened the position of people with disabilities during the ancient times. For instance, the dictation of the texts of Confucianism was the primary means of examination, yet at that time it was impossible for people with visual impairments to participate in this type of examination prior to the invention of braille (Zhu, 2011). During the Ming Dynasty, the situation worsened, with emperor Ming Xiaozong making it plain that people with disabilities were not allowed to study in official schools, which left them bereft of an education, and it enhanced discrimination against them in an implicit way (Lu, 1996). This discrimination led to the exclusion of people with disabilities from gaining an education being taken for granted in ancient China, and it has evolved into them being excluded from being able to enjoy equal educational resources in modern China.

2.2.2 The policies and practice of special education

Many nations implemented a great deal of legislation and policies to encourage the development of special education (Duhaney, 1999), with China being no exception. In the following two sections, a wide range of legislation and policies related to special education and the LRC will be addressed.

In 1874, the first school for the blind, 'Gu Sou Tong Wen Guan' (Mission to Chinese Blind in Peking), was established in Beijing by a Scottish Presbyterian pastor, William Moore (Ellsworth & Zhang, 2007). In 1887, the first school for the deaf, 'Qi An Xue Guan' (Enlightening School), was founded in Yantai by US missionaries Charles and Annetta Mills. At this time, special education schools were mostly private, or run by charitable organisations, and the government did not get involved in special education until 1927 when the first state-run special education school was set up in Nanjing (Zhu, 2012). By the end of 1947, there were only 42

special education schools, which served 2000 children with hearing or visual impairments (Pang & Richey, 2006).

Following the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, central government acknowledged the urgent need to develop special education (Pang & Richey, 2006), which led to this form of education gaining more prominence.

In 1951, all private special education schools and institutions were incorporated into a public education system following the passing of the *Resolution on the Reform of the School System* (Deng & Poon-McBrayer, 2004). Moreover, a series of policy documents were published to clarify what should be learned, as well as how to learn, in special education schools (Zhu, 2011). In 1953, only 64 special education schools were operating, serving 5000 students, yet the number of such schools had quadrupled by 1965, reaching a total number of 266, with 22850 students studying at them (Lei, 2011). Special education schools were only open to children with hearing or visual impairments, but their progress was subsequently halted. In 1966, the Cultural Revolution transformed the entire nation, and during this period many schools closed and factories shut down. According to Lei (2011), only another three schools were established, making the total number 269 at the time of the Cultural Revolution ending in 1976. However, Zhu (2011) claimed that the number of special education schools did not increase but actually decreased to 246, hence it is evident that the development of special education severely slowed or even stagnated due to the Cultural Revolution.

In 1979, measures were implemented to include children with mental retardation in special education, with the first class being established for such children in the School for the Deaf in Shanghai (Deng & Poon-McBrayer, 2012; Ellsworth & Zhang, 2007). Three categories of disabilities (visual impairments, hearing impairments and mental retardation) started to receive education in special education schools. In the 1980s, Deng Xiaoping came into power and his open-door policy caused the economy to grow rapidly, with the improved economic conditions accelerating the development of special education, leading to a series of regulations and legislation concerning special education being sanctioned. In 1986, the *Compulsory Education*

Act was passed, legally acknowledging the right of children to be educated, including those with disabilities. In 1988, 'Learning in Regular Classes' was introduced to solve the issue of the enrollment of children with disabilities.

In 1989, *Suggestions on Developing Special Education* outlined a preliminary special education delivery structure whereby schools for children with visual impairments would be established at the provincial level, schools for children with hearing impairments established at city level and schools for children with mental retardation established at the county level (Deng & Poon-McBrayer, 2004). Furthermore, in 1990, *The Law of the People's Republic of China on the Protection of Disabled Persons* was passed, which sought to protect the civil rights of people with disabilities, stipulating that they have equal rights as those without disability in terms of receiving education.

In 2006, the government revised the *Compulsory Education Act* and clarified some key issues. Firstly, school-aged children with disabilities were to receive nine-year compulsory education; funding for special education schools or classes should be higher than for mainstream schools; no school can refuse school-aged children for any reason, and regarding those which have denied children with disabilities, local governments are to instruct them to reverse their decision within a specified period; and local government should be responsible for setting up special education schools or classrooms and running them appropriately to satisfy the needs of children with disabilities. Also, mainstream schools should enroll and support those able to adapt to mainstream school conditions despite having disabilities (Meng, Liu & Liu, 2007), hence mainstream schools were not only open to all non-disabled children, but also to those with mild disabilities but the ability to adapt to regular schools.

Suggestions on Improving the Enterprise of the Disabled and *Suggestions on Speeding up Special Education Development* were published in 2008 and 2009 respectively. Confronting issues in special education, these proposals called for the enhancement of teaching quality and preparation, as well as advocating the extension of special education to pre-school (State Council of China, 2008; General Office of the State Council, 2009). In 2010, *China's National Plan for Medium-Long Term*

Education Reform and Development (2010-2020) proposed establishing a special education school in each city or county with 300,000 people or more by 2020 (State Council of China, 2010). In 2014, a series of top-down policy documents, *The 2014-2016 Promotion Plan of Special Education and The Second Phase Promotion Plan of Special Education 2017-2020,* were enacted at the national, provincial and city levels, while the programme of 'delivering education to home' was also implemented, enabling more children with severe disabilities to receive education in their homes.

During the previous decades, special education conditions have improved significantly and its development has gained increasing attention both domestically and internationally. The number of these schools has increased dramatically from 1379 in 1988 to 2288 in 2021 (Peng, 2015; Ministry of Education, 2021), and the system of special education, which covers pre-school to higher education, was established, with around 149.1 million children receiving education in special education schools, special classes in mainstream schools and regular classes in neighbourhood schools in 2021 (Ministry of Education, 2021).

2.2.3 The origins of Learning in Regular Classes (LRC)

The history of Learning in Regular Classes (LRC) can be traced back to the 1950s when schools in remote rural areas began to invite local students with disabilities to study there (Hua, 2003; Piao, 2008; Xiao, 2005). However, this practice was not endorsed legally until 1986 when the *Compulsory Education Act* was passed, stipulating that every school aged child should receive nine years of compulsory education (six years for primary school and three for junior middle school), including those with disabilities. Hence, local governments were given the responsibility of providing educational services to children with disabilities through special education schools or classes (Deng Harris, 2008; Lv, 2012). Nevertheless, at that time there were only 375 special education schools in China, enrolling 50,000 children, while the number of people with disabilities in China had reached 51.64 million, with more than 8.17 million being school aged children (Zhao, 2013). Therefore, only 0.61% of children with disabilities were enrolled into schools,

contradicting the purpose of the *Compulsory Education Act* (1986) which made education universal in China. The government did not have sufficient funds to set up more special education schools after the turbulence of the Cultural Revolution (from 1966 to 1976), while it was impossible to set up enough schools within a short period to satisfy the educational needs of children with disabilities (Deng & Poon-McBrayer, 2004), thus the government advocated the exploration of diverse educational services for them (Lei, 2011).

Xu Bailun, who lost his sight, was committed to developing education for children with visual impairments and he founded a non-governmental organisation, Golden Key Research Center, in 1984. In 1987, a project named 'Golden Key', which was led by this centre was launched in Beijing and the four provinces of Jiangxi, Jiangsu, Hebei and Heilongjiang. The purpose of the project was to include children with visual disabilities in mainstream schools (Chen, 1997; Deng & Manset, 2000), while the western concepts of 'normalisation' and 'mainstreaming' were also introduced into China due to Deng Xiaoping's Open-door Policy. Influenced by these concepts, Xu subsequently developed the project in a manner that both embraced the spirit of 'normalisation' and the unique domestic conditions in relation to special education (Deng, 2009). Moreover, to ensure the success of this project, three measures were implemented: the public dissemination of the ideology of humanism; the offering of professional training for regular education teachers; and the construction of a system of guidance (Deng, 2009). This project achieved great success and influenced the decision-making of the policy makers that followed (Lv, 2012), with some scholars regarding the 'Golden Key Project' as the milestone of the LRC (Deng, 2009; Lv, 2012).

In 1988, the 'Learning in Regular Classes' (LRC) initiative was officially introduced through the first National Special Education Conference (Chen, 1997), with the model subsequently shaped by a series of experimental programmes. Despite the success of the 'Golden Key' project, a series of trials led by the Ministry of Education of China were conducted throughout the nation. In 1989, a trial which included children with visual impairments and mental retardation in mainstream schools was carried out in locations such as Heibei, Zhejiang, Shanxi, Shandong,

Liaoning, Beijing and Jiangsu (Piao, 2004; Xiao, 2005). The focus of which was to evaluate the feasibility of launching LRC in remote rural areas, and in 1992 another trial that placed children with hearing or speech impairments into mainstream schools was conducted in Beijing, Jiangsu, Heilongjiang and Hubei. By then, the trials of LRC had increased to three categories of disabilities, namely hearing impairments, visual impairments and mental retardation.

2.2.4 The expansion of Learning in Regular Classes (LRC)

Since 1990, five national conferences have been held to discuss and summarise the findings of these trials, with a policy document ultimately published, *Measures of Implementing Learning in Regular Classes for Children and Adolescents with Disabilities,* in 1994, which was the first policy that specified the implementation of Learning in Regular Classes (LRC) at the school level. Six parts were elaborated on, including LRC targets, entrance, requirements of teaching, professional training, parental training and management issues. This document stated that the notion of LRC was interpreted by central government as enabling children with disabilities to attend neighbourhood schools to allow them to play and study with those without disability (Ministry of Education of China, 1994). 'Children with disabilities' in this instance primarily refers to those with moderate mental retardation or hearing and visual impairments. Regarding the definition of 'moderate', only a rather obscure explanation was given, namely that such children are capable of studying in mainstream schools (State Council of China, 2008). The policy also ruled that no more than three children with disabilities can be placed in a regular class; they should be supported with individualised and remedial education; and schools cannot refuse to admit children with disabilities.

In 1996, a policy entitled *The Ninth National Implementation Plan of Compulsory Education for Children with Disabilities* was jointly released by the Ministry of Education and the China Disabled Person Federation. It clarified that LRC served as the primary educational means for including children with disabilities, thereby promoting compulsory education, stating 'take the LRC and special classes as the main body and special education schools as the backbone' (Ministry of Education

and the China Disabled Persons' Federation, 1996). In 2001, another crucial policy, *The Suggestions on Further Advancing Reform and Development of Special Education in the Tenth Five Years,* was published, which stipulated that an LRC teaching management system should be established, while resource rooms and teachers should be equipped in mainstream schools to help students with disabilities to adapt more seamlessly to school life (State Council of China, 2001).

In 2006, the government revised the *Compulsory Education Act,* leading to LRC being written into China's legal system with the requirement that mainstream schools enrol and support those able to adapt to the mainstream school environment, even if students have disabilities (State Council of China, 2006). Having gone through two decades of policy evolution, LRC was no longer a trial as it had received official approval from central government (see Table 2.2.4).

Table 2.2.4 A timeline and highlights of legislation concerning the development of LRC

Time	Names	Highlights
1986	Compulsory Education Act	All the children have rights to be educated.
1990	People' s Republic of China on the Protection of Disabled Persons	People with disabilities enjoy equal rights to receive education
1994	Measures of Implementing Learning in Regular Classes for Children and Adolescents with disabilities	The first policy specifies the implementation of LRC at the school levels including LRC targets, entrance, requirements of teaching, professional training, parental training and management issues.
1996	The Ninth National Implementation Plan of Compulsory Education for Children with Disabilities	LRC served as the main educational means to include children with disabilities.
2001	The Suggestions on Further Advancing Reform and Development of Special Education in the Tenth Five Years	LRC teaching management system should be established. Resource rooms and resource teachers should be equipped in regular schools.
2006	Compulsory Education Act (Amendment)	The regular schools should enrol and support those who are able to adapt to regular school circumstances, even if the students have disabilities.

As discussed, the main purpose of launching LRC was to tackle the enrollment issue of students with disabilities caused by the inadequate number of special education schools, therefore the government sought for mainstream schools to enroll more students with disabilities to create more educational opportunities for students with disabilities. LRC is regarded as an approach to ensuring that more students with disabilities enjoy the right to access educational services, and there is evidence that it works. According to the National Education Committee (1989), the enrollment rate of children with disabilities (mental retardation, hearing and visual impairments) aged seven to fifteen, was 0.33%, 5% and 3% respectively in 1988, while it was estimated that there were more than 100,000 children with disabilities learning at school in 1995, with 77.12% placed in regular classes, thus LRC is the primary means for placing students with disabilities in the educational setting (Lei, 2011).

The LRC model was subsequently extended to higher and pre-school education. In 2011, 7150 students with disabilities were enrolled by higher education institutions, accounting for 89% of the number of students with disabilities who had accessed higher education (Jiang, 2013), with the remainder accessing it via distance learning and adult education, and some outstanding students enrolled as postgraduate or PhD students. LRC has been the key route in terms of accessing higher education for students with disabilities (Jiang, 2013), while a number of kindergartens have enrolled pupils who have mental retardation, hearing and visual impairments, although there are not yet any specific figures to illustrate that.

2.2.5 The most recent policies

Since 2014, a series of top-down special education policy documents have been enacted at the national, provincial and city levels to escalate the development of special education in China. A national policy document entitled *The 2014-2016 Promotion Plan of Special Education* (national first phrase plan) was enacted in early 2014. It was the first time that policy or legislation in relation to special education was passed in the name of the General Office of the State Council, while seven departments were involved; the Ministry of Education, the Development and Reform Commission, the Ministry of Finance, Human Resources and Social Security,

the Ministry of Health, the Family Planning Commission and the China Disabled Person Federation. Some scholars viewed it as ‘a historic step’ for the development of special education (Xu, Cooper & Sin, 2017). Three years later, an extended national policy document, *The Second Phase Promotion Plan of Special Education 2017-2020* (national second phrase plan) was enacted. These measures reflect the determination of China’s government to promote special education, as well as inclusive education. In these policies they list key tasks for the development of special education over the three years that followed from a macro perspective. Along with these tasks, numerous manipulable strategies and administrative responsibility body for each item were presented. Regarding the highlights of these two plans, the first phase plan focuses on quantity, such as increasing the number of special education schools, professional teachers and enrollment rates, whereas the second phase plan seeks to improve quality (Wu, Zhao & Qin, 2019). Furthermore, in response to these national plans, all of China’s provinces and cities enacted local plans with the purpose of developing special education, with Zhejiang Province, where Jiangzhou is located, included.

2.2.5.1 Provincial policies

Zhejiang Province, located in the east of China, is a developed area in the nation. In response to the national plan, the province published *The 2014-2016 Promotion Plan of Special Education of Zhejiang* (municipal first phase plan) and *The Second Phase Promotion Plan Special Education (2017-2020) of Zheijang* (municipal second phase plan) in 2014 and at the end of 2017 respectively. As provincial plans, they were required to give consideration to both the local context and national plans, and given that these provincial plans were enacted in light of the national plan, they inevitably have many common features.

Even though some scholars claimed that the focus of the development of special education in China has shifted from enrollment rate to teaching quality (e.g. Deng & Su, 2011; Peng, 2015), the government evidently continues to attach high importance to increasing the enrollment rate. According to Ding (2016), 80,000 children with disabilities (hearing impairments, visual impairments and mental

retardation) have not accepted nine-year compulsory education to date despite being the required age for compulsory education, and this figure may be even greater. Peng (2015) also pointed out that the enrollment rate for children with disabilities had increased dramatically in the past three decades, with almost 72% in 2012, yet the gap was still evident compared with mainstream school enrollment rate, with around 98% in 2012. Therefore, both the national and provincial plans identified school enrollment as a target for 2016 and included it in their 'overall objectives'.

The national first phase plan stipulated that the target regarding compulsory education school enrollment for children with visual impairments, hearing impairments and mental retardation should be 90% or more, with the provincial plan setting a similar target of 95% or more. In the second phrase plans, the target was increased to 95% for the national plan and 98% for the provincial plan, while the descriptions of school-age children with disabilities was extended to seven categories. In 2014, the target of compulsory education school enrollment had been confined to children with visual impairments, hearing impairments and mental retardation. In terms of other disability categories, only a rather vague description was provided, namely that the educational rights of those with other categories of disabilities will invariably be increased (General Office of Zhejiang Provincial People's Government, 2014). Nonetheless, in 2017 the target children were extended to physical disabilities, speech and language disabilities, mental disorders including autism and multiple disabilities. Given that there are seven categories of disabilities in China (visual impairments, hearing impairments, mental retardation, physical disabilities, speech and language disabilities, mental disorders including autism and multiple disabilities), this signifies that all children with disabilities are accounted for.

To fulfill the above target, governments enlarged the scale of compulsory education using three methods: children with mild disabilities were placed into mainstream schools; children with moderate and severe disabilities were placed into special education schools; and children with severe disabilities were to be provided education at home (General Office of Zhejiang Provincial People's Government, 2014). The provincial plan made it clear that mainstream schools are not allowed to

reject any children if they they have mild disabilities. In contrast, they are responsible for offering proper support for those children in the form of resource rooms and accessibility facilities.

Moreover, challenges which were encountered in the development of special education also influenced the implementation of the provincial plan. The number of children with visual and hearing impairments is decreasing due to improvements in the public health system. Therefore, a proposal was made to refine the system of special education, with 'special education schools for children with visual impairments primarily established in provincial capital cities, special education schools for children with hearing impairments mainly established at the city level, and special education schools for children with mental retardation predominantly established at the county level' (General Office of Zhejiang Provincial People's Government, 2014). On the other hand, it has been reported that there is an increasing number of children with autism being born in developed areas in China (Peng, 2015). In 2004, 1.53% of children aged between 2 to 6 were diagnosed as having autism in Beijing, yet the amount of children aged from 18 to 24 months in Shenzheng who had been diagnosed as autistic was 2.76% (Wucailu behaviour modification centre, 2015), hence Zhejiang, as a developed area in China, was also encouraged to establish special education schools for autistic persons if possible.

Due to special education having been extended to preschool education and junior middle school by 2001 (Ellsworth & Zhang, 2007), these plans reiterated the requirement for continued development of non-compulsory education, including preschool, senior high school and higher education. According to the provincial first phase plan, kindergartens should include children with disabilities as much as possible, and as for those which have included children with disabilities, resource rooms should be established to support them, but concerning how to define 'some', no clear description was provided. Until 2017, the national second phrase plan ruled that schools that had enrolled five or more students with disabilities should construct resource rooms.

Moreover, according to the provincial first phase plan, vocational education should

be offered in most senior high schools for children falling under three categories of disabilities (visual impairments, hearing impairment and mental retardation), while higher institutions should not reject any children on the basis of their disabilities (General Office of Zhejiang Provincial People's Government, 2014). To improve the support given to the development of special education, the plan states that more funds should be allocated to special education in the three years that followed. According to the national first phase plan, no less than 6000RMB per year would be allocated to each child who was studying in special education schools, mainstream schools or being educated at home. In Zhejiang, children with disabilities are able to enjoy free accommodation and tuition during compulsory education.

Regarding increasing teaching quality, some measures were listed in the plans, such as offering pre-service and in-service training for teachers working in special education or mainstream schools, to enhance special education researches and reform teaching strategies. These measures were emphasised in both the first and second phase plans, but they were underdeveloped. For instance, 'support special education schools to create and revise compulsory education textbooks for children with visual impairments, hearing impairment and mental retardation' is stated in the provincial first phase plan. Nonetheless, whom or which department is responsible for this measure, how to support it and what the basic requirements are for the school-based textbooks mentioned is not outlined. Without solving such problems, this measure is very challenging to put into practice, therefore these measures are more akin to words intended to entice than regulations or manipulable measures.

2.2.5.2 Municipal policies

The municipal government published *The 2014-2016 Promotion Plan of Special Education of Jiangzhou* at the end of 2013 and it is notable that the date of this policy is earlier than the national policy. In China, the publication of polices generally follows the top-down principal, which means that a policy is typically released at the national level first, then the provincial and municipal levels. Jiangzhou broke this top-down rule and took the initiative by releasing its own policy to promote the development of special education, demonstrating the

determination of local government to develop special education as well as LRC.

In *The 2014-2016 Promotion Plan of Special Education of Jiangzhou*, despite the ambitious compulsory enrollment target of 98% in 2016, local government made significant breakthroughs in terms of LRC.

Firstly, it refined the management system of LRC, outlining its plan to 'build a regional management system of LRC with a special education resource centre as the core, with both mainstream schools and special education schools jointly participating' (General Office of Jiangzhou Municipal People's Government, 2013). The special education resource centre is intended to have the function of providing professional support and educational services for local mainstream schools, students with special education needs and their parents. Some scholars viewed it as a localised product of the practice of LRC and a critical aspect of the management system of LRC (Wan, et al., 2018; Qin & Liu, 2021). Moreover, the policy document specified that special education resource centres were to be built in special education schools, with up to three special education itinerant teachers on hand to direct the practice of LRC in mainstream schools. Patently, the government regards LRC as a part of special education and believes that special education schools are effective at educating children with disabilities and those with special education needs.

Secondly, it addressed the urgent need for resource rooms and teachers in terms of satisfying the requirements of students with special education needs in mainstream schools. The notion of 'resource rooms' was introduced by Irwin in 1913, and they were primarily utilised to help students with visual impairments to study in mainstream schools (Wang, 2007). In the 1950s, resource rooms were built and used in nations such as the U.S., and in the 1990s resource rooms were introduced to the east coast of China (Liu, 2007). Following two decades of practice, they were recognised by many scholars, with some expressing that the support of resource rooms is a critical factor influencing the effectiveness of LRC (Wang, Yang & Zhang, 2006). This municipal policy clarified that 'at least one resource room should be built in primary schools and junior middle schools respectively of each sub-district (township)'. To standardise the construction of these rooms, another

municipal policy, *The Notice on Printing and Distributing Measures of Construction and Management of Resource Rooms for Children with Special Education Needs in Jiangzhou,* was published in 2015, which provided a detailed explanation of the requirements regarding the construction of resource rooms, including area, equipment, teaching tools and the criteria of 'qualified resource rooms' and 'model resource rooms'. In accordance with these criteria, the municipal educational department announced the construction of 100 model resource rooms in 2017 as part of *The Second Phase Promotion Plan of Special Education 2017-2020 of Jiangzhou*.

Regarding resource teachers, three aspects, recruitment, in-service training and allowance were involved in the policy. Firstly, in terms of recruitment, there were innovative points raised, such as its stipulation that if a mainstream school enrolled 6 students or more with special education needs within three years, a resource teacher would be recruited by the local special education school and assigned to the mainstream school to support its students. This increases the likelihood that resource teachers will be deemed a part of special education schools, enabling them to enjoy the same treatment as teachers in special education schools in terms of personal development and allowance. On one hand, this approach guarantees that these resource teachers are of a professional standard when recruited, and they can be suitably reallocated based on the needs of mainstream schools. However, it is difficult to put it into practice, and there have not yet been any resource teachers recruited by special education schools. On the contrary, they are all from mainstream schools and most are part-time, signifying that they may be responsible both for subject teaching and LRC-related work.

2.2.6 The connection between Learning in Regular Classes (LRC) and inclusive education

In the early 1990s, inclusive education was introduced into China in line with the concept of 'education for all', meaning that this form of education is committed to offering equal and equitable educational opportunities for all students, including those with disabilities (Booth & Ainscow, 1998). Given that LRC is considered to be a Chinese model of inclusive education, some scholars have drawn a comparison

between inclusive education and the LRC programme, finding that they have many points in common. Firstly, students with disabilities are placed in an inclusive setting and gain the opportunity to study and interact with non-disabled students. Secondly, the right to receive education with equity and equality for all students, including those with disabilities, are emphasised. Thirdly, both claim to offer individualised teaching, counseling and consulting on the basis of the diverse needs of students, and fourthly, both reflect the integration of special and regular education (Piao, 2004).

Some differences between LRC and inclusive education have been found. Inclusive education seeks to provide equal opportunities as well as a high quality education to children, whereas LRC focuses more on the former. Therefore, a number of scholars and educators have perceived LRC as the Chinese inclusive education model, or even equated it to inclusive education. Furthermore, some have started to use the word 'inclusive education' instead of LRC when discussing the LRC practice of Chinese inclusive schools (Deng & Jin, 2013). However, this may be caused by them having studied and learned from the advanced experiences related to inclusive education in other nations, such as the USA and the UK, and applied them in practice to accelerate the reform of special education in China. In 2003, China's Ministry of Education stated that LRC is a Chinese inclusive education model and is an educational innovation that combines the experience of inclusive education from other nations and the reality of special education in China (Ministry of Education of China, 2003).

The value behind these models is another difference which has been identified and discussed by many scholars (Deng, Poon-McBrayer & Farnsworth, 2001; Hawkins, Zhou & Lee, 2001; Xu, Cooper & Sin, 2017). Western nations advocate democracy, freedom and equality, believing that individual interests and rights exceed collective interests, and they convey to people that educational services, including those with disabilities, are their inherent rights. In China, as discussed, the dominant value is Collectivism, which emphasises the interests of the collective rather than those of individuals (Xu, Cooper & Sin, 2017), with the latter expected to take on their own responsibilities as part of a group and follow established rules (Rozman, 1991).

2.3 Key Elements Behind the Success of Learning in Regular Classes (LRC)

No matter the significant challenges that all nations are confronted with, researchers and practitioners continue to take both policy and practice in a more inclusive direction. Some elements have been repeatedly researched given that they are deemed to be the key elements to the success of inclusive education and LRC, such as teachers' perceptions and preparation for inclusion.

2.3.1 Teachers' perceptions

As the key implementer of inclusive education, teachers' attitudes, as well as their perceptions, are considered to be essential to the success of LRC. Their attitudes and perceptions have been researched extensively for decades, with teachers generally divided into three categories, namely regular education, special education (resource teachers) and principals. In this context, regular education teachers refer to those working in a mainstream school and have students with special education needs in their classes.

2.3.1.1 Regular education teachers' perceptions

Regular education teachers primarily refer to course teachers in mainstream schools, and there is no consensus internationally regarding these teachers' perceptions in relation to inclusive education. Some studies have reported regular education teachers showing positive attitudes to inclusive education, whereas others have reported that although these teachers have expressed their positive attitudes towards it, they were unwilling to be involved in the practice of inclusive education (e.g. Amaireh, 2017; Kim, 2010).

Realising the crucial role that regular education teachers play, many Chinese researchers have carried out studies on teachers' attitudes as well as their practice. Similar to the results at the international level, those in China were unclear.

Deng (2008) selected 252 primary school teachers from urban and rural areas and investigated their attitudes towards LRC. The findings indicate that regardless of their gender, age or location, a number of the teachers held positive attitudes towards LRC and conceded that inclusive education is the current trend in the development of special education. Nonetheless, most suggested that it is more appropriate to place children with disabilities in special education schools rather than mainstream ones. In addition, the teachers from urban areas exhibited more of a negative attitude towards LRC than those from rural areas. There may be two reasons for this: 1) there are more special education schools in urban areas and it is easier for children to access them; and 2) teachers in urban areas suffer more pressure to ensure students' high academic achievements compared to those in rural areas (Deng 2008). Another study carried out by Zeng (2007) focused on teachers' attitudes and the teaching strategies applied in daily classes, investigating 70 teachers from Xiamen who have students with disabilities in their classes through questionnaires and interviews, and found that their attitudes towards LRC are generally positive and affirmative.

Nevertheless, the findings of resent research seem to differ from previous research. Two research studies recently published established that regular education teachers held negative attitudes towards LRC. Su, Guo and Wang (2020) surveyed 712 participants from Shanghai and Anhui province, including 197 teachers, 170 parents of children with ASD and 337 parents of children without disability. The results indicated that parents held the most positive attitudes towards LRC, whereas teachers held the least positive. Another research study was carried out in Sichuan province, where 26 teachers were interviewed to investigate their understanding of LRC, and the findings were that most showed negative attitudes.

Moreover, the anxiety caused by lacking confidence to teach students with disabilities or being unprepared to teach them has been reported for a significant amount of time. Therefore, despite supporting LRC, a number of teachers have an inclination for segregated special education school placements (Peng, 2003). It was established in a recent study investigating 264 teachers from compulsory education schools that those who attended training related to special education showed a more positive attitude than those who did not (Zhao, et al., 2020). Other variables such as

the scale of classes and categories of disabilities may also lessen the positive attitude of regular teachers toward LRC (Liu, Du & Yao, 2000).

2.3.1.2 Special education teachers' perceptions

Special education and regular education teachers play decisive roles in inclusive setting given that both are responsible for putting policy into practice through their daily teaching and routine. It is unsurprising that many researchers prefer to investigate regular education teachers' attitudes and those of special education teachers' simultaneously as they wish to make a comparison of both sides. It is widely recognised that special education teachers show more positive attitudes towards inclusive education than regular education ones (Carter & Hughes, 2006; Dymond, et al., 2007), yet researchers in China rarely investigate the attitude of special education teachers (resource teachers), and there may be two possible reasons for this.

Firstly, as discussed, most special education teachers (resource teachers) are part-time and have dual responsibilities, namely in relation to subject instruction and individualised instruction for students with special education needs. When conducting research, these resource teachers are likely to be classed as regular education teachers. Secondly, resource rooms and teachers are still new concepts in some areas, hence the amount of resource teachers is perhaps insufficient when it comes to conducting research.

2.3.1.3 Principal's attitudes

Moreover, it has been affirmed that school leaders' attitudes, as well as their knowledge, are pivotal to the success of implementing inclusive education (Kuyini & Desai, 2007), with principals who show more positive attitudes towards inclusion potentially including more students with disabilities (Salisbury, 2006). Moreover, the values and beliefs of principals may have a profound influence on teachers, who in turn impact the achievements of students with special education needs (Poon-McBrayer & Wong, 2013).

In China, there has been little research conducted which has made principals' attitudes and their understanding of LRC as its only target, while many have presented the findings of teachers or administrators. A study conducted by Deng and Guo (2007) did investigate principals only and the researchers interviewed 19 principals of elementary schools in an attempt to discern their understanding of inclusive education. All of the principals showed positive attitudes towards LRC, expressing that 'there is no problem for the students with disabilities to study and participate in most activities with those without disability', while also admitting that the implementation of LRC was beneficial for both students with disabilities and those without. However, they identified several major problems which may threaten the carrying out of LRC, such as the examination-oriented system. Similarly, Shi (2015) investigated the attitude of kindergarten principals, with only 43% of them showing a positive attitude towards LRC and only 31% expressing their willingness to include children with special education needs in their schools.

School leaders and principals may report positive attitudes in relation to LRC, yet the authenticity of such answers should be treated with some scepticism. In China, almost all principals are not only the administrators of their school but also the executors of policies and are accustomed to catering to policies, rarely expressing an adverse opinion, even if they do hold one. One should bear in mind that the real influence on the practice of LRC is not their claims but their true beliefs.

2.3.2 Preparation and personal development

To ensure the quality of teaching, greater effort should be put into offering appropriate training for both pre-service and in-service teachers. *Law of the People's Republic of China on the Protection of Disabled Persons* (2008), article 28, requires that normal institutions should set up a special education curriculum and impart relevant knowledge to the students, but among the 137 normal institutions, only 13.9% have followed the request (Wang, 2006). Moreover, many studies indicate that only a small number of in-service teachers have been provided with training concerning special education, while it is reported that 71% of teachers from rural

areas and 67% from urban areas have not received any training related to special education in Hubei (Deng, 2005), and similar results were found for Shanghai, with 37% of teachers receiving special education training (Ma & Tan, 2010). Only if all teachers are well equipped with sufficient skills and knowledge can the quality of their teaching improve.

Recently, acknowledging the urgent requirement for special education training, more in-service teacher training in relation to LRC has been carried out throughout China. More attention has been given to the development of LRC, while more funds for teacher training have been allocated with the purpose of enhancing the quality of LRC (Feng, 2017; Wang & Xiao, 2017). Nevertheless, more students with special education needs have been enrolled by mainstream schools, with teachers eager to learn particular education knowledge and skills in order to competently instruct students with special education needs. Also, problems regarding teacher training have been repeatedly reported, such as low attendance, insufficient time and impractical content (Li, 2012; Li, 2021; Zhao & Jiang, 2014).

Jiang, Niu and Deng (2016) investigated the situation of LRC in 490 primary and secondary schools in Beijing through a questionnaire, revealing that no more than 10% of teachers participated in training concerning special education in most schools, while only 15% of schools reported that the number of teachers attending training is more than 50%. Similarly, another study reflected that 71.68% of regular education teachers had never attended any training on special education and the number of resource teachers who had received special education training accounted for 43.75% (Zhao, et al., 2020), therefore the opportunities for teacher training in terms of special education are limited in some parts of China.

2.4 Evaluation of the Practice of the LRC

To develop a deep understanding of LRC, some researchers have investigated the situation regarding its practice in different areas of China, with one national study utilising a self-made questionnaire to evaluate the practice of LRC in Beijing, Tianjing and other three provinces. Seventy-seven persons, including principals,

researchers, experts, administrators and first-line teachers were interviewed, which found positive results in terms of support systems, campus atmosphere, peer relationships and teachers' perception of LRC (Qian & Jiang, 2004). Another research study focused on one district of Beijing and applied a self-made questionnaire and interviews to investigate the practice of LRC. In this study, 211 regular education teachers, 62 administraors and 140 parents of students with special education needs were included and it was found that the attitude of teachers towards LRC is generally neutral, while support from governments and parents were priorities for schools (Wang, Peng & Wang, 2011). Five years later, another research was carried out in Beijing, with 490 primary and secondary schools selected to complete questionnaires concerning the practice of LRC. The results showed that 94% of schools were carrying out LRC and some LRC groups were established in these schools, whereas the participation of resource teachers and parents of students with special education needs was low. Moreover, unsatisfactory results were reported concerning teacher training, curricula adjustment, teaching strategies and student assessment (Jiang, Niu & Deng, 2016). Likewise, in Shanghai, questionnaires based on the requirements of local government were distributed to 300 schools, which also indicated poor performance in terms of curriculum adjustment, student assessment and professional teachers (Yu, 2011).

From all the studies listed above, it is evident that studies concerning the practice of LRC have mainly been conducted in Beijing and Shanghai and it is acknowledged that economic growth generally results in increased investment in education (Xu, Cooper & Sin, 2017), with Beijing and Shanghai viewed as top cities in China in terms of their economy. Their practice of LRC is inevitably at the forefront and rich data can be collected from these places, hence many researchers have targeted these cities for that reason. However, cities such as Jiangzhou, which is a second-tier city of China, has rarely been researched in the last ten years.

Moreover, regarding the methods applied in these studies, most researchers have preferred self-made questionnaires to evaluate the practice of LRC, with the questions used embodying the direction that LRC will take in the future. Some researchers even viewed the dimensions of a questionnaire as the index for the

quality of LRC (e.g.Wang, Liu & Wang, 2022), but all the questionnaires mentioned above were self-made. Most were designed based on relevant literature and the recommendations of experts and usually used on only one occasion. All these indexes constitute a lack of validity, thus the author adopted the 'index for Inclusion', which has been put into practice in more than thirty nations for over twenty years as the framework for evaluating the practice of LRC in the context of Jiangzhou.

2.5 Conceptual Framework

To guarantee that inclusive education continues moving towards a more inclusive direction, some governments and researchers have been devoted to designing the standards for high-quality inclusive education. Patently, in terms of inclusive education, China remains at a preliminary stage, yet the determination of its central government to pursue high-quality inclusive education is evident in recently released documents, with some using the term 'inclusive education' rather than 'LRC'. Both *The 2014-2016 Promotion Plan of Special Education* and *The Second Phase Promotion Plan of Special Education 2017-2020* outlined plans to build an evaluation system regarding the quality of inclusive education (General Office of the State Council, 2014; Ministry of Education and seven other departments, 2017). To achieve this, some researchers have attempted to produce an evaluation system for high-quality LRC in the context of China. Yan, Guan and Deng (2016) stated that their evaluation system provides 'support and resource, management and leadership, culture and environment, teaching and learning, and students' performance' based on the 'input-process-output' model. Similarly, Chen and Deng (2020) proposed the evaluation system, which consists of 'access and transition, education resource, teaching staff, campus culture, school management'. however, neither have been put into practice.

On the international level, the exploration of the index of high quality inclusive education never ceases. Farrell (2004) created four dimensions of an inclusive school, including 'presence', 'acceptance', 'participation' and 'achievement'. Kyfiazopoulou and Webe (2009) outlined a model of 'input-process-output', which was subsequently developed into three levels: individuals at the macroscopical level;

schools at the middle level; and governments at the microcosmic level (Loreman, Forlin and Sharma, 2014). Booth and Ainscow (2002) proposed the 'index for inclusion', providing detailed explanations of what an inclusive school is and how to use the index for the self-review for schools. Moreover, despite the efforts of researchers, some governments are devoted to constructing evaluation systems in accordance with their local practices, such as the *Quality Indicators for Effective Inclusive Education Guide book* for New Jersey, the U.S. and *Indicators of Inclusive Schools Continuing the Conversation* in Alberta, Canada (Loreman, 2004).

In this study, the 'index for inclusion' was adopted as its conceptual framework (Booth & Ainscow, 2002), which is defined as 'developing learning and participation in schools' and is a set of materials to support the self-review of all aspects of a school, including activities in playgrounds, staff rooms, classrooms and the communities and environment around the school. It encourages all staff, parents and carers, and children to contribute to an inclusive development plan and apply it in practice (p.9).

The 'index for inclusion' was first published by the Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education (CSIE) in Bristol in 2000 (Booth and Ainscow, 2000) and is based on three-year studies of 25 schools across the U.K. Subsequently, the researched schools was expanded to 2600, covering primary, secondary and special education schools worldwide (Rustemier & Booth, 2005; Vislie, 2003), and the material of the index is extensive. It is utilised as an index to evaluate the practice of inclusive education at the school level, as well as a guide to support schools to put the 'index for inclusion' into practice.

This thesis primarily focuses on the former, and according to Booth and Ainscow (2002) there are three dimensions for inclusive schools, namely creating inclusive cultures, producing inclusive policies and evolving inclusive practices. Beneath each dimension there are two indicates for further focus on what should be done in inclusive settings, with 'building community' and 'establishing inclusive values' being the primary indicates for the dimension of inclusive culture. Beneath the dimension of inclusive policies are 'developing the school for all' and 'organising

support for diversity', while 'orchestrating learning' and 'mobilising resources' are the indicates for the dimension of inclusive practices. Moreover, these three dimensions are inter-influenced. Inclusive culture, which comprises inclusive beliefs and collaborative relationships, is regarded as the 'heart' of the school development and it is believed that both school policy and practice would changed with improvements in school culture (see Figure 2.5).

Figure 2.5 The dimensions and sections in the index (Booth & Ainscow, 2002, p8)

Dimension A Creating inclusive culture	Section A1: Establishing inclusive values
	Section A2: Building community
Dimension B Producing inclusive policies	Section B1: Developing the school for all
	Section B2: Organising support for diversity
Dimension C Evolving inclusive practices	Section C1: Orchestrating learning
	Section C2: Mobilising resources

The 'index for inclusion' was adopted as the conceptual framework for two main reasons. Firstly, the index was put into practice in different contexts, while it has been translated into many languages and put into practice in more than thirty nations for 'self-review' and 'inclusive development'. These not only cover developed nations such as New Zealand, Austria, Spain and Norway, but developing ones (Nes, 2009; Alborno & Gaad, 2014). For instance, a case study conducted in the United Arab Emirates applied the 'index for inclusion' to identify potential challenges existing in inclusive schools. Moreover, the government of Hong Kong, which shares similar cultural values as mainland China, revised the index and applied it to evaluate the practice of inclusive education (Chen & Deng, 2021).

Secondly, the purpose of the index fits the research of this thesis as it seeks to increase the involvement of all students by identifying and minimising barriers of learning and participation (Forlin, 2004; Ainscow, Booth & Dyson, 2006; Braunsteiner & Mariano-Lapidus, 2014). Similarly, the purpose of this research is to identify achievements made and the barriers that may impede the promotion of LRC

in order to make proposals for further practice.

2.6 Summary of the Literature Review

China has a history of more than 5000 years, and having been influenced by Confucianism and imperial competitive examinations, education has been viewed as a means of cultivating the elite. The history of special education is only around 100 years, which reflects that the rights of people with disabilities to receive educational services have been severely neglected.

Learning in Regular Classes (LRC), which enrolls local children with moderate disabilities into mainstream schools is viewed as a Chinese model of inclusive education. Originally, it was an expedient measure to increase the enrollment rate of school-aged children with disabilities, but after several years of trials, LRC was proven to be pragmatic in terms of increasing enrollment rates. Hence, significant policies concerning special education and LRC were published to ensure the dominant role of LRC in offering educational services to children with disabilities and special education needs. Recently, a series of top-down policy documents were published which aim to shift the emphasis from quantity to quality.

Moreover, the unique historical and cultural context of China has been discussed, with public awareness, issues of individual rights and its examination-oriented education system identified as three factors which may threaten the success of LRC. Comparisons were made between inclusive education and LRC, finding that both have many features in common in terms of objectives and methods, but they differ in their values and focus. LRC, rooted in Collectivism, focuses more on the enrollment rates, while inclusive education, which values people with disabilities being empowered to receive educational services, focuses more on high quality education. They both face challenges due to unsatisfactory performance, thus some elements, such as teachers' attitudes and their preparation, which are conceived as key factors to the success of LRC, and the evaluation system were discussed and compared in order to examine present studies concerning LRC. Moreover, the conceptual framework of the 'index of inclusion' was presented and described.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

This chapter discuses the research methodology used in this study and is divided into six sections. The first section discusses the research design and outlines the reasons for a qualitative approach rather than a quantitative approach being chosen. The second section is data collection, where three methods, including interview, observation and documentation review are introduced, as well as the process of collecting data. The third section covers sampling and consists of site information, target schools and participants, and in the the fourth section the process of data analysis is presented, with examples provided to illustrate. The fifth section addresses validity and reliability. Finally, the matter of ethical issues is acknowledged to evidence that such issues have been given consideration to.

3.1 Research Design

Case study refers to selecting one or more specific examples to explain a more complex phenomena, with Tight (2010) describing it as a detailed examination of an occurrence, or occurrences, that may not seem significant on a wider scale. Holism, multiple methods and focused context are deemed the primary characteristics of case study (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007), and due to these features, a rich description is produced, which is suitable when it comes to answering open questions relating to matters such as what a person enjoys or what participants' feelings are. The research question is an open one:

- How is LRC understood and implemented at the school and district levels?
- What are the common perspectives and experiences of LRC teachers?

Using a case study allows an in-depth investigation, thereby discerning underlying

issues through the eyes of participants. Moreover, it also has the function of providing propositions for policy makers, practitioners and theorists (Bassey, 1999), which is consistent with the purpose of this study.

In China, a great deal of research is conducted through a quantitative approach, with surveys viewed as an effective method that has been widely applied in research given its advantage of allowing the researcher to collect a significant amount of data within a short period (Rao, 1994, cited in Deng 2008). One can find the same situation in studies of LRC, whereby the use of surveys to collect data is prominent among researchers. Qian and Jiang (2004) investigated the effectiveness of LRC though a survey, Yang (2011) carried out a survey to research the development of students with disabilities in schools practising LRC, while Wang, Yang and Zhang (2006) applied a survey to explore the factors that influenced the quality of LRC practice.

However, surveys also have limitations, hence one should be careful concerning how they are designed, ensuring that information is not misunderstood by the respondents. Furthermore, researchers should be detached when developing the questions to avoid them containing information that induces the respondents to give inauthentic answers, thus affecting the results (Blaikie, 2010). In addition, surveys usually comprise some written questions which do not contain any detailed explanation. Interpretations of questions vary, thus different interpretations may lead to rather different results, therefore a qualitative approach is required to conduct an in-depth study and reveal the problems or conflicts underlying the issue at hand.

3.2 Data collection

3.2.1 The stance of the researcher

A common criticism of qualitative studies is that they are biased or subjective. Since researchers act as instruments to collect data and analyse it (Eisner, 1991), some are concerned that their findings may be influenced by their own bias. Nevertheless, Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2006) stated that clarifying researchers' own bias,

including perspectives, experiences and characteristics is an effective way of ensuring the validity of qualitative researches, hence the author's work experience and personal identity, which may have an influence on the research, will be disclosed.

When I began to conduct the research, I was a front-line teacher in a special education school and the students I taught were teenagers with hearing problems aged from 16 to 22. I also worked as a class teacher and thoroughly understood the responsibilities of this role, but I had never worked with teachers in mainstream schools. Moreover, I knew a little about LRC policy and how it is practiced in mainstream schools, and I had gained information concerning students with special education needs primarily from literature and communicating with one student. Due to this student being transferred from a mainstream school, he was identified as a 'student with special education needs' when he was studying in a primary school. Overall, my impression of primary schools was confined to my experience of studying in one.

Since the methodology applied is a case study, three schools from Hongxian, Fangxian and Zixian Districts respectively were selected as target schools. Both interviews and observations were conducted in these schools, while analysis of documents was also carried out to better comprehend the practice of LRC.

Initially, my target participants for the study were teachers, students with special education needs and their parents. Since students are the objects of LRC, and their parents witness or even participate in LRC at the school level, their perceptions and feelings in relation to LRC may be the most direct data capable of illustrating the operation of LRC. Nonetheless, after negotiations with several principles, it was seemingly impossible to gain access to students or their parents, with principals refusing my requests to conduct interviews with them or observe classes that students with special education needs attended. One of the principals informed me directly that

> It is fine to interview some teachers, but for students and parents there is

no possibility unless there is an administrative order allowing us to do so.

Consequently, this study focuses only on teachers.

After finish collecting the data, I applied for a suspension of two years due to personal affairs, during which I received a promotion. Furthermore, I was still teaching in the vocational department of the special education school while also working as an administrator at Jiangzhou Special Education Guidance Centre, which was founded in 2015, and I selected teachers from this centre as participants in my study. This centre was largely responsible for organising teachers' training, teaching and researching activities, evaluations in relation to special education and LRC, with my main responsibility at that time being to organise teachers' training.

Thereafter, I was selected by the Jiangzhou Education Bureau and took up a temporary position as an administrator who was mainly responsible for how special education and LRC operated throughout the entire city. My role included writing official documents and reports, answering queries concerning special education and LRC online or via telephone and evaluating the education bureau at the district level based on its performance related to special education and LRC. Moreover, I studied many published and unpublished documents concerning LRC for work purposes during that time. When I returned to my thesis, I had gained work experience of twelve years at a special education school, two years in the municipal special education guidance centre and one year in a local education bureau.

3.2.2 Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were applied as the predominant approach to collecting the data. The rationale for selecting this method was based on the following three aspects: firstly, interviews allow both participants and interviewers to express their ideas in a more accurate and flexible manner (Best & Kahn, 1993; Coll & Chapman, 2000). Secondly, a semi-structured approach means that every conversation can help to answer the research questions (Clark & Schober, 1992). Thirdly, some answers cannot be garnered directly from ticks or words, but can be gained from subtle

expressions or interactions during face to face interviews.

Semi-structured interviews were carried out with three vice principals (administrators), three class teachers and two resource teachers from three primary schools, as well as five inspectors from a special education school, and they were divided into two phases. The first was interviews with inspectors from a special education school where the author was working, and the second was with teachers from three primary schools.

Prior to conducting the study, an examination led by Jiangzhou Education Bureau was held with the objective of evaluating whether *the 2014-2016 Promotion Plan of Special Education of Jiangzhou* was implemented effectively across the city's various districts. Eight teachers from the school the author works at were selected as inspectors, with five selected in line with certain requirements, which are explained in Section 3.3.5. Every interviewee was asked for their interpretation of the practice of LRC, including basic information concerning inclusive schools, the challenges that may impede the practice of LRC, the achievements which have made by their schools and their perceptions of LRC. All the questions began with open-ended questions to allow interviewees to express their perceptions as freely as possible and minimise the influence of the researcher (Clark & Schober, 1992; Spradley, 1979). The purpose of the first phase interview was to develop a fundamental understanding of the practice of LRC at the school and district levels and to collect data for the subsequent interviews with teachers from primary schools.

The second phase of interviews was conducted with eight teachers from three primary schools, and based on the data collected from the first phase and the literature review, interview protocols for vice principals (administrators), class teachers and resource teachers were developed (see Appendix B and C). These were divided into four themes: entrance, school accommodation, resource rooms and others, with every theme designed using the conceptual framework of the 'index for inclusion'. Entrance mainly concerns basic information about students with special education needs studying in those schools, while the themes of school accommodation and resource rooms were included to collect data related to

dimensions of ‘inclusive policy’ and ‘inclusive practice’. The questions beneath the theme of others were designed to collect data regarding ‘inclusive culture’ (Booth & Ainscow, 2002).

All of the interviews were held in participants’ schools, lasted from 40 to 60 minutes, and were recorded with the approval of interviewees, enabling the author to focus more on the responses of the interviewees and ensuring the accuracy of the data (Gall, Gall & Borg, 1999; Patton, 1990). Prior to the interview, the interviewees were informed that all the conversations would be recorded, with the interview protocol sent via QQ, a communication software. Moreover, after the interviews were transcribed, they were sent to the participants via QQ for them to add or clarify any points.

3.2.3 Observations

The observations of the three schools were similar to school visits. One participant, either the vice principal or the resource teacher, would guide the author around the school, leading her to resource rooms specifically designed for students with special education needs, where there were different kinds of teaching materials, teaching aids and rules on the wall. During the visit, informal conversations about the operation of resource rooms took place, as well as the history of the schools, helping the author to increase her knowledge of the practice of LRC at the school level. To protect the privacy of the students, observing classes was not allowed; instead visits to their classrooms and resource teachers’ offices could be carried out. In these rooms, an intuitive sense of the classroom environment for students with special education needs could be gained, while it also allowed useful materials, such as the teachers’ curriculum, student files and booklets concerning LRC to be collected.

3.2.4 Document analysis

To gain a better understanding of the practice of LRC in Jiangzhou, three levels of documents were explored to complements the interviews, with the first being at the national and provincial levels, including laws, legislation and policies from 1980 to

2017. The practice of LRC is a top-down approach, thus it is crucial to understand the documents produced at the highest level and the process of evolution. The second were documents at the municipal level, with some measures implemented by those primary schools having been taken as they were requirements of the local documents. The third were documents at the school level, including Individualised Education Plans (IEPs), student profiles, class schedules and regulations of LRC at the school level. The author took photographs of these documents after securing permission from the teachers.

3.3 Sampling

In China's schooling system, there are two types of schools, namely mainstream schools and special education schools, in terms of enrollment targets. Every mainstream school which has students with disabilities or special education needs are deemed to practice LRC and they are also known as inclusive schools. The topic of students with disabilities and special education needs is so sensitive that schools tend not to release related information to the public. Therefore, snowball sampling has been applied, which is useful in terms of researching a sensitive topic or one that is difficult to gain access to (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). Five inspectors were interviewed first to obtain information about inclusive schools, with three schools selected and their principals contacted to gain access. After finishing the interviews with vice-principals (administrators) who were recommended by the principals, the vice-principals (administrators) were asked to recommend class teachers and resource teachers to the author who were involved in the practice of LRC. These recommendations enabled the author to access target candidates easily, and all were willing to participate in the study. Finally, two groups of persons were interviewed: teachers selected from three mainstream schools, including vice-principals (administrators), class teachers and resource teachers, and inspectors chosen from a special education school.

3.3.1 Site

Jiangzhou is in the southeast of China with an area of 9816 square kilometers and a

population of 9.542 million. It is a big city in the southeast of China, not far from Shanghai, and due to its scenic environment and relatively developed economy, Jiangzhou is deemed one of the best cities in China in terms of well-being.

There are ten districts in Jiangzhou and this study focused on three, Hongxian, Fangxian and Zixian, which make up the central area of Jiangzhou. Hongxian District had been the political centre of Jiangzhou ten years ago, yet along with the movement of the municipal government and urbanisation development, the political centre changed to Zixian District. Additionally, Zixian District is also regarded as the most developed District in terms of economy in both Jiangzhou and Zhejiang province. Hongxian, Fangxian and Zixian Districts serve more than 226,000 students, with 97 primary schools and 67 junior middle schools.

3.3.2 Educational structures of Jiangzhou

3.3.2.1 Structure of mainstream schools

According to the *Compulsory Education Act* (2018), it is compulsory for children to study in primary school from the age of six. Furthermore, every child is supposed to study in a school near their houses, and there is no justifiable reason for schools to reject any student. Children finish their primary school studies in six years, subsequently they are enrolled by a junior middle school, where they spend three years studying and preparing for the senior high school entrance examination. The six years for primary school and three for junior middle school comprise the nine years of compulsory education in China. Subsequently, students are enrolled by senior high or vocational schools according to the ranking of their scores in the senior high school entrance examination. In 2021, the amount of students that could be enrolled by senior high schools reached 50% in Jiangzhou, hence the other 50% went to vocational schools, which means that they have almost certainly lost the opportunity to go to a highly regarded university, with most of them joining the workforce after graduation. Therefore, both teachers and parents regard the senior high school entrance examination as a decisive moment, thereby increasing the pressure on both students and teachers in junior middle and primary schools.

3.3.2.2 Admission procedures

To ensure the equal educational rights for every child, China adopted the policy of nearby enrollment during the period of compulsory education. In 1986, this policy was first outlined by the *Compulsory Education Act* and it has since been widely implemented, while it is emphasised in the admission documentation every year. This policy stipulates that all school-aged children are to go to the schools located near their homes. It requires parents to prepare some materials, such as a household register and house ownership certificate to prove basic information related to their children, and then submit the materials to the school to be reviewed. Once all the material meets the requirements, the child is likely to receive an admission letter from the school.

3.3.2.3 Procedure to be identified as a student with special education needs

According to *Some Opinions of the Zhejiang Province Education Department on Further Strengthening the Work of Learning in Regular Classes* (Zhejiang Provincial Department of Education, 2012), children studying in mainstream schools who wish to be identified as having special education needs to undergo a series of procedures.

Firstly, children must go to medical institutions with corresponding qualifications at the county level or above to take an examination, with the medical institutions to provide the result in terms of the category and degree of disability.

Secondly, their parents hand in material to the school, including an application form and the results provided by the medical institution.

Thirdly, the school passes the material to the local education administrative departments, which includes a report given by the medical institutions, an application form and suggestions offered by the school.

Fourthly, the local education administrative departments gather experts in special

education to review these materials and give approval to those who satisfy the requirements. Thereafter, those identified as students with special education needs are entitled to be given 'special treatment' from schools.

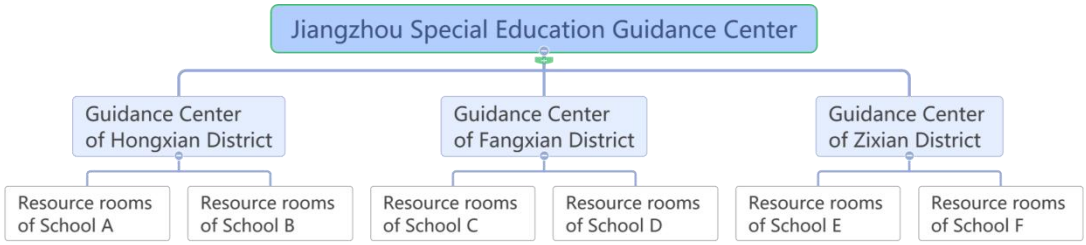
In practice, there may exist two types of scenarios, with the first being that parents understand the condition of their children and gain a certificate of disability for them, as well as asking schools for additional support. With this certificate, the children could be identified as students with special education needs. The other is that parents are unaware of their children's problems or they chose to conceal them, and after one or two years of observation class teachers may discover that some students are different from others.

3.3.2.4 Special education guidance centre

Following the announcement of *The 2014-2016 Promotion Plan of Special Education of Jiangzho*, the Jiangzhou Special Education Guidance Centre was built to offer support and guidance for special education and mainstream schools enrolling children with special education needs. There are two levels of special education guidance centre, namely the municipal level and the district level, with the municipal guidance centre established in a special education school at the municipal level in 2015. Subsequently, special education guidance centres at the district level were established to offer professional guidance and suggestions for the practice of LRC in mainstream schools. Similarly, these district-level guidance centres are usually built in a local special education school, which is due to the government's belief that teachers in these schools are more experienced and knowledgeable in terms of educating students with special education needs, deeming them to be sufficiently qualified to instruct the practice of LRC in local mainstream schools. Taking Hongxian District as an example, the special education guidance centre was established in a special education school, which is one of the most renowned in China. Overall, special education schools, special education guidance centres and mainstream schools are cooperating to promote the implementation of LRC. Moreover, they typically operate in this fashion: led by the municipal education bureau, the special education guidance centre at the municipal level is responsible

for instructing and supporting the work of guidance centres at the district level, and the guidance centres at the district level are responsible for guiding and supporting the work of LRC in schools, particularly that of resource rooms in local mainstream schools (see Figure 3.3.2.4).

Figure 3.3.2.4 : The network of special education guidance centres



Prior to the establishment of resource guidance centres, there was a clear boundary between special education schools and mainstream schools, which rarely overlapped. The special education school which the author works at did not have a significant connection with mainstream schools until the end of 2015. Following the dissemination of *The 2014-2016 Promotion Plan of Special Education of Jiangzhou*, a new organisation named the Jiangzhou Special Education Guidance Centre was founded in the school the author works at. Subsequently, the school has been entitled to a new function that offers support and advice for special education and mainstream schools that enrol children with special education needs. As a result, the boundary between special education and mainstream schools began to be eradicated and the interaction between these two types of schools seems to be increasing. Influenced by these changes, the author, as a front-line special education teacher, gained the opportunity to discover more information about mainstream schools and how LCR is implemented in schools.

3.3.3 School selection

Initially, the author interviewed teachers from her school who were appointed as inspectors to evaluate mainstream schools which were implementing LRC. These interviews led to the realisation that some mainstream schools, despite being equipped with resource rooms, may not implement LRC as there were no students

with special education needs studying there. Five schools were recommended that may be suitable for this study, with three public primary schools ultimately selected: Haihong Primary School in Hongxian District, Dongfang Primary School in Fangxian District and Zipu Primary School in Zixian District. These three districts constitute the urban area of Jiangzhou and they are also known as the 'old three districts' by local people. The criteria for selecting the target schools were as follows:

- These schools had to be located in different districts in Jiangzhou;
- Rich information had to be obtained from these schools;
- These schools had to have enrolled at least one child with special education needs.

3.3.4 Information about three schools

3.3.4.1 Haihong Primary School

Haihong Primary School was founded in 1985 and now there are almost forty teachers and more than nine hundred students in the school. It is located in the centre of Hongxian District, formerly the administrative centre of Jiangzhou, and the distance between the school and the location of the former municipal government building is approximately 3 kilometers. The apartments which surround the school are more than twenty years old and some have been earmarked by the government for demolition. Aging apartments usually means low rent and housing prices, with these apartments near the school having attracted migrant families with low incomes, and many decided to send their children to study in this school. According to the dean of studies, students from migrant families comprised the majority of students with special education needs.

In this school, there were nine students with special education needs, primarily with speaking, emotional and cognitive issues. Concerning resource teachers, there were more than twenty and every teacher who offered educational services to students with special education needs was identified as a resource teacher, consisting of subject teachers of Chinese and mathematics, class teachers and psychology teachers

who offered instruction in resource rooms. The resource rooms were located on the top floor and they were not large, only one quarter the size of a regular classroom, and they featured teaching aids, one small desk and chairs.

3.3.4.2 Dongfang Primary School

Dongfang Primary School is a newly built public school founded in 2013 with fifty-seven teachers and more than one thousand students. It is located in the northern part of Fangxian District and originally it was constructed as one of the supporting facilities of an industrial park only one kilometre from the school. Along with urbanisation developments, the industrial park declined gradually and was replaced by residential buildings.

In Dongfang Primary School, there are two students who are identified as having special education needs due to mental retardation, while it has two full-time resource teachers who majored in special education and psychology respectively. Similar to Haihong Primary School, every teacher who offers educational services to students with special education needs is classified as a part-time resource teacher, including mathematics, Chinese and class teachers.

Moreover, this primary school is also where the special education guidance centre of Fangxian District is located. Typically, a special education guidance centre is established in the local special education school, and since the special education school in Fangxian District is not operated by educational departments, the local education bureau opted for this primary school as an alternative. In this school, nine rooms of one of its floors are used as resource rooms for the school and the guidance centre, including for psychological counselling, sensory integration training, multi-sensory training, speech training, multi-intelligence, individual consultation, group counselling, a sand table and catharsis. Each room is new and well-equipped, while the sensory integration training room is the largest, and all commonly used equipment could be found in this room, such as slides and climbing walls. In terms of personnel, the two full-time resource teachers mentioned above are also staff in the guidance centre and are responsible for offering educational services to students

with special education needs in this school and in others in Fangxian District.

3.3.4.3 Zipu Primary School

Zipu Primary School enjoys a long history and was built in 1914 in a region in Zixian District which has both urban and suburban areas. It is one of the largest primary schools in Jiangzhou, serving more than one hundred teachers and nearly two thousand students, and it is one of the first pilot schools regarding the implementation of LRC in Zixian District. Seven students were identified as those with special education needs in this school and they were distributed among Grades Two and Six, with most having mild mental retardation. To improve how LRC was being conducted, a group named 'resource teachers group' was established in the school, which has six teachers; five resource teachers and one administrator. Two of the resource teachers hold certificates of national psychological counselors, while the others were selected due to their high capabilities and enthusiasm towards their work.

Regarding the resource rooms, there are two on the top level, with one large and one small. In the latter, many teaching tools used to train children's abilities in relation to fine movement, hand-eye coordination and cognitive competence could be found. The large room is divided into six parts and tends to be used for group counselling. On the wall of each room and in hallways, information about LRC could be found, including its introduction, the progress that the school had made and the rules for using resource rooms.

Zipu Primary School was selected as one of the first pilot schools regarding the practice of LRC in Zixian District, therefore the school devoted considerable effort to the construction of resource rooms and training for resource teachers, with more than 100 thousand RMB invested to provide equipment for resource rooms and to train resource teachers that year.

3.3.4.4 Mainstream school's classrooms

In these three schools, the classroom buildings consisted of no more than four floors, and all the classrooms are arranged according to grades, with those of the same grades usually located on the same floor. The lower grade the students are, the lower floor they are placed on, therefore students in Grades One and Two are usually placed on the first or second floor, while students in Grades Five and Six are placed on the top floor.

Every classroom in the three schools is big and bright, and each is estimated to accommodate around 50 students. At the front of the classrooms, there is a blackboard and a multimedia machine, with the blackboard used to display information about homework, the students on duty and class notices. At the back of the classroom, there is another blackboard used to popularise knowledge based on specific topics. For instance, these blackboards are likely to be decorated in line with the topic of Children's Day in June because June 1st is Children's Day. During that month, images of children and knowledge related to Children' Day are to be presented on the blackboards at the back of the class. Moreover, students' work, honour lists, school rules and schedules could also be found on the walls.

3.3.4.5 Resource rooms

Regarding mainstream schools that intend to put LRC into practice, building resource rooms is necessary. According to Sun (2013), resource rooms refer to classrooms set in mainstream schools which aim to offer individualised instructions to students with special education needs, and the room is typically equipped with resource teachers and various teaching materials, teaching aids and teaching media to provide greater support for students' learning. To enhance the management of the construction and employment of resource rooms, a document named *Notice on printing and distributing the Implementation Measures for Construction and Management of Resource rooms for Children and Adolescents with Special Education Needs in Jiangzhou (Trial)* was published in 2015, specifying the requirements for the construction of resource rooms and the criteria for their evaluation (Jiangzhou Education Bureau, 2015). This document is used as a guide for all schools planning to build resource rooms, with 315 having been built in

primary or junior middle schools to satisfy the requirement that ‘at the end of 2020, at least one resource room is built in every township and all the resource rooms are built with standards for the construction of resource classrooms’ (Jiangzhou Education Bureau, 2017). To encourage the construction of resource rooms, an evaluation of ‘qualified resource rooms’ and ‘model resource rooms’ has been conducted annually since 2018. Around 100 resource rooms have been evaluated as ‘model resource rooms’, with an incentive of 40000 RMB awarded for each one.

Regarding the resource rooms in these three primary schools, two have been evaluated as ‘model resource rooms’, while one is a ‘qualified resource room’ . However, every resource room is placed on the top floor, rather than the bottom one as suggested by the document, with one vice-principal explaining that ‘the purpose is to protect the privacy of students with special education needs’. Students accept the individualised instructions in the resource rooms within a specific time and usually they learn in regular classrooms. Only those identified as students with special education needs are able to benefit from the services in resource rooms.

3.3.5 Participants

This study involved four groups of teachers, namely vice-principals (administrators), class teachers and resource teachers from three target schools, and five inspectors from special education schools. In this section, the identities of these participants will be described in detail.

As a first-line teacher in a special education school, the author did not previously have a great deal of contact with mainstream schools, hence the first step was to gain the trust of the ‘gate-keepers’ of these three schools as only with the approval of the principals could this study be carried out, thus a lot of preparation was conducted beforehand. Initially, the principals of three target schools were contacted via telephone, where the author explained her identity, the objectives of this research and research plans, inviting them to participate in the interviews if possible. Each principal indicated that they did not know much about the implementation of LRC in their school, while recommending that their vice principal or administrators be

contacted instead. Therefore, the dean of studies of Haihong Primary School, vice principal of Dongfang Primary School and the dean of studies of Zipu Primary School were contacted, who were named as the 'vice-principals (administrators) group'. After gaining their approvals, an interview protocol was shared with them, and subsequently a time was fixed for both the interviews and the observation.

3.3.5.1 Vice-principals (administrators)

Hong: Hong is the dean of studies of Haihong Primary School and has been working in the school for more than 20 years. As the dean of studies, she is responsible for the implementation of LRC throughout the entire school, which she has been in charge of for more than ten years. Moreover, she is also a Grade 2 mathematics teacher and has one student identified as having special educational needs in her class. The interview with her was held in her office and it was evident that she was very busy, and despite the interview being carried out after school, it was interrupted three times due to school affairs.

Sun: Sun is the vice-principal of Dangfang Primary School and has worked there for more than fifteen years. As a psychology teacher, he is also highly interested in special education. In 2015, the Special Education Resource Guidance Centre of Fangxian District was founded in the school that he works at, which he is the founder and director of despite his position as vice principal.

Prior to the interview, the author was shown around the special education rResource guidance centre in the school. From his introduction, it was evident that as a founder, he put a significant amount of time and energy into this centre. He had learned a great deal of special education knowledge, invited experts to offer suggestions on the construction of the centre and recruited professional teachers to support mainstream schools, students with special education needs and resource teachers.

Yang: Yang is the vice-principal of Zipu Primary School and is in charge of the teaching in the school, including the implementation of LRC. The school was one of the first pilot schools to implement LRC in Zixian District and he has led its

implementation since he was appointed the vice principal. Furthermore, he has also taught mathematics for more than twenty years.

Initially, an interview with Yang was not the intention as an interview with the dean of studies had already been arranged. However, when the author visited the school, the dean of studies changed her mind and recommended that the vice-principal participate instead, which was to some extent understandable. When the author arrived at the large office of the dean of studies, there were six teachers there, with Yang being one of them, who all shared the same office as the dean of the studies. In Chinese culture, when a leader is present in a group, the leader will likely be the speaker unless refusing to do so. Patently, Yang took my interview very seriously as he read my interview protocol first and spent several minutes writing a draft for my questions.

The group of 'vice-principles (administrators)' played a vital role in my study as their recommendations enabled me to gain access to class and resource teachers. Usually, the interviews with the vice principals or deans of studies were completed first and then the author would request to interview one class teacher and one resource teacher who were involved in the work of LRC. Thereafter, the vice principal or dean of studies were responsible for finding target participants.

3.3.5.2 Class Teachers

In China's primary schools, class teachers play critical roles as they are not only responsible for teaching but for the daily management of the entire class. This study includes three class teachers from three target schools, with all of them selected as participants due to there being at least one student identified as having special education needs in their classes.

Zhang: Zhang works in Haihong Primary School and has been working as a Chinese teacher for fourteen years. In her class, there is one student identified as having special education needs, while according to her statement, there are another two students who may have emotional and behavioural problems. Moreover, Hong (the

dean of studies) and Zhang are responsible for the mathematics and Chinese teaching for the same class, and the interview was held in Hong's office, with Hong occasionally joining when Zhang mentioned specific affairs concerning students with special education needs.

Qiu: Qiu is a Chinese teacher in Dongfang Primary School and has worked there for four years. Currently, she is a Grade Four class teacher and in her class there are two students identified as having special education needs, with one being a boy and the other a girl. From the interview, it was evident that Qiu likes these two students because every time she mentioned them a smile would appear on her face. The interview was carried out in Sun's office and Sun (vice-principal) remained in there throughout the interview. As a consequence, Qiu was perhaps more inclined to offer indirect answers when faced with challenging questions.

Chun: Chun is from Zipu Primary School and is a Grade Six Chinese teacher, which she has taught for twenty years, while in her class there is one student identified as having special education needs. The interview was held in her office, which did not feel big when there were six teachers in it, making it feel crowded. Chun was interviewed at noon during a designated break for teachers, yet there remained several students in the office, with some reciting passages, and others handing in assignments.

3.3.5.3 Resource teachers

Resource teachers are responsible for making Individualised Education Plans (IEP) and offering individualised teaching for students with special education needs (Xu & Yang, 2005). Two resource teachers were interviewed in this study, with one from Dongfang Primary School and the other from Zipu Primary School, yet the definitions of resource teachers were unclear in some schools. For instance, in Haihong Primary School, class teachers who have students with special education needs studying in their class are also known as resource teachers. When asked whether a resource teacher of the school could be interviewed, the deans of studies pointed to Zhang (a class teacher) and informed the author that she was also a

resource teacher, therefore no resource teachers other than the class teacher was interviewed in Haihong Primary School.

Qin: Qin works in Dongfang Primary School, majored in psychology at university and is a full-time resource teacher, where she had been working for nearly five years. Unlike other participants in the interviews, Qin not only teaches psychology in Dongfang Primary School, but works as a resource teacher in the local special education guidance centre. As a resource teacher for the entire district, she is obliged to offer individualised education for students throughout the whole district if required. Sometimes, she must also go to other mainstream schools to offer support for their implementation of LRC, thus to some extent she plays the role of an expert in LRC.

Yiwei: Yiwei is a part-time resource teacher and he also works as a class teacher and mathematics teacher for Grade Four. Yiwei has worked as a teacher for 16 years and has held the position of resource teacher since 2010 when the school was chosen as a pilot for the practice of LRC. He informed the author that he assumed the position of a resource teacher as he enjoys psychology and special education, while he originally learned knowledge concerning special education through self-study.

3.3.5.4 Inspectors

The interviews with teachers from primary schools are the second phase. Prior to those, interviews were conducted with inspectors who had taken part in an evaluation of the practice of LRC and the development of special education. In this evaluation group, thirteen people were inspectors, including eight teachers from the school the author works at and five officers from Jiangzhou Education Bureau. Five inspectors who examined urban areas (Hongxian, Fangxian and Zixian Districts) were selected as participants.

To enhance how the inspection is carried out, an undisclosed booklet, *Handbook for the Inspection of the Three-year-plan,* was distributed to each inspector. This handbook states that the purpose of this evalustion concerns the working process and

evaluation criteria. According to the handbook, the evaluation would last for two weeks and each group was entitled to select one day to conduct the evaluation for each district. They were required to listen to the report regarding the special education work, including the practice of LRC for each district, interview the reporters and review their data or related information in the morning. In the afternoon, they visited mainstream schools to examine their practice of LRC and then graded them.

As mentioned, interaction between special education schools and mainstream schools was rare before 2015. Even for those inspectors, for some it was the first time they had stepped into mainstream schools to evaluate the practice of LRC, hence there were three standards when selecting the participants:

- Those who previously took part in similar evaluations or whose work has some connection with mainstream schools are prioritised;
- Candidates should have some basic knowledge of LRC;
- The interviewers selected should cover Hongxian, Fangxian and Zixian Districts.

Consequently, five inspectors were selected.

Jun: Jun is the dean of studies of a special education school and she majored in special education at university, and at that time she had been working as a Chinese teacher in a special education school for over twenty years. Due to the position she holds, she has been selected as an inspector for mainstream schools before.

Fang: Fang is a Chinese teacher from a special education school and has nearly thirty years of working experience. As an office administrator of a special education school, she has had opportunities to make contact with mainstream schools.

Yan: Yan has been working as a teacher for more than thirty years and was the vice principal of a mainstream school five years ago, subsequently transferring to a special education school to take up the same position.

Ming: Ming is a P.E. teacher with more than 15 years working experience in a special education school and his major is special education. As well as working as a P.E. teacher, he is a member of staff at the Jiangzhou Special Education Guidance Centre where he is in charge of the implementation of LRC across the entire city, and he has worked there since the centre was built.

Chai: Chai is a vice-principal and a Chinese teacher in a special education school with more than twenty working experience, while he is also the director and founder of the Jiangzhou Special Education Guidance Centre. He was invited in his capacity as a special education expert to many mainstream schools to offer suggestions and lectures concerning the practice of LRC. He is also one of the drafters of *The 2014-2016 Promotion Plan of Special Education of Jiangzhou* and *The Second Phase Promotion Plan of Special Education of Jiangzhou (2017- 2020)*.

3.4 Data Analysis

Multiple sources were utilised to answer the research questions, including interviews, observation and documentation review, while to develop a thorough understanding of all the data collected, content analysis was used for data analysis. Content analysis is a process whereby categories are drawn from text, with similar categories brought together to form a larger category, and it has been described simply as coding, categorising, comparing and concluding (Ezzy, 2002; Cohen, Manion & Mirrison, 2018). During the comparing phase, data was compared and the occurrences or frequencies of some key words or sentences were calculated to reach a theoretical conclusion, which demonstrates, as many researchers have stated, that the essence of content analysis is a combination of analytical and statistical methods (Anderson and Arsenault, 1998; Weber, 1990).

According to Newby (2010, p.485), content analysis can be divided into three categories: ‘conventional content analysis’, ‘directed content analysis’ and ‘summative content analysis’, with the key differences between these three categories concerning how the initial categories are developed. For conventional

content analysis, initial categories are derived from coding, while for directed content analysis, initial categories are selected from previous theories or hypotheses, and regarding summative content analysis, original categories are chosen based on previous research or the researcher's research interests.

The author applied directed content analysis, which involves initial categories being selected from existing theories and hypotheses. Some have claimed that this method may cause the results to be confined to previous findings, or it may simply evaluate a previous theory or hypothesis. Nonetheless, directed content analysis allows the current theory or hypothesis to be modified or extended to produce an appropriate category that codes could fit in (Ezzy, 2008; Flick, 1998).

In this study, prior to analysing data, several categories were selected from the literature which were regarded as important elements to the success of LRC. Taking the interviews with teachers as examples, three themes were originally selected, including 'teachers' attitudes towards students with special education needs', 'professional development' and 'teachers' understanding of LRC'. However, one of the research questions concerns how LRC is implemented at the school level, and after reading the entire text and taking the research questions into consideration, the initial themes were extended to four, with a new category of 'Measures'. Subsequently, the texts were broken down into small units with a label identifying the primary idea of each small unit, with these labels assigning small units into specific themes. Subsequently, all the units were compared and their frequencies were counted to formulate sub-themes under a larger theme. For instance, all of the data listed below (Table 3.4) belongs to the larger theme of professional development, and when they were compared, sub-themes could be formulated as 'practical training' and 'unpractical training'.

Table 3.4 Analysing interview transcripts

Themes	Sub-themes	Quotes
Professional development	Practical training	At that time, I participated in a training in relation to LRC in Shanghai. This training was designed for resource teachers and was closely related to our work (Qin from Dongfang Primary School). ...Another thing that we spent a lot of money on was training for teachers. We arranged training for resource teachers many times and we also sent teachers to Hangzhou and other cities to take part in the training. The professional knowledge of the resource teachers in our school has developed rapidly as a consequence, such as Mr Chen, Ms Zheng and Ms Wang. They have all performed outstandingly well in the work of resource rooms and been leading figures in Zixian District. (Yang from Zipu Primary School).
	Impractical training	...they took part in some short-period training before, all of these trainings were more like theoretical lectures, useful but not so practical. (Hong from Haihong Primary School). Then we also took part in a series of class observations and lectures which were mainly about special education and we found that it was not so closely related to the work we were doing (Qin from Dongfang Primary School).

3.5 Validity and Reliability

In this study, description validity, triangulation and member check were carried out to ensure the validity and reliability of the research.

3.5.1 Description validity

Description validity refers to the researcher's reporting being 'what actually happened' and the data not being distorted or interfered with (Maxwell, 1992). To ensure the validity of the descriptive material, each interview was audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim as soon as possible, with all the information, including participants' speech, facial expressions and emotions recorded. Thereafter, a summary of each interview was made and sent to the participants via QQ, a communication software. Furthermore, given that all the interviews were conducted in Chinese, after receiving the responses of participants, all the interviews were translated into English and sent to my supervisor to ensure all words and expressions were clear and understandable.

3.5.2 Triangulation

According to Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2007), triangulation may be defined as two or more methods being conducted for data collection which seek to fully map out or explain the social science, with the involvement of multiple methods being its primary characteristic. Two or more methods could lead to more reliable and valid data, since the data is checked using various methods. Researchers have also stated that triangulation is very suitable when studies seek to explain an educational outcome from a holistic view, or a complex phenomenon (Adelman, et al., 1980). In this study, interviews, observations and document reviews were utilised as methods for collecting data, with the data collected from interviews triangulated with those from observations and documentation reviews.

3.5.3 Member check

Member check is also known as respondent validation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), which is a technique that allows participants to make comments on previous interviews, thus any misinterpretation or misunderstanding would be reduced and the validity enhanced (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Typically, the author would clarify what she had heard in previous interviews or what was seen during observations,

encouraging participants to clarify or discuss anything unclear.

3.6 Ethical Issues

Regarding ethical issues, the major issue is that research requires the researcher to maintain a balance between the demands of pursuing the truth and preserving the participants' rights not to be made to feel uncomfortable by the research (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). The situation regarding the implementation of LRC is such a sensitive topic given that many students with special education needs are involved and their parents may not wish for their children to be given the label of 'student with special education needs' or 'student with disabilities', thus the participants in the study were changed, with the decision made to interview teachers only. The teachers consist of three vice-principals (administrators), three class teachers, two resource teachers and five inspectors, and to achieve the balance mentioned above, the following measures were implemented:

Firstly, the principle of informed consent was followed from the outset of the study. Since the research was conducted in three mainstream schools, all the participants were provided with the key information regarding the research, and each participant was free to decide if they wished to take part in it. The objectives of the study were explained as follows: the objective of the research, the time necessary for the research, the identity of the researcher and the people able to access the data once it has been collected.

Secondly, to protect the privacy of participants, all the participants, their schools, the districts and the city were recorded with anonymity. The real names of three schools and the participants were not presented either in the research report or in paper record, and all the data collected from the research was stored in a locked computer, with only the researcher having access to it.

3.7 Summary

To answer the research questions, a case study was selected as the methodology,

with three method types used to collect data, namely interview, observation and documentation review. Interviews were conducted with eight teachers from three primary schools and five inspectors who had examined the practice of LRC in these schools. These schools, particularly their resource rooms, were visited by the author while accompanied by participants, and three levels of documents were reviewed to better comprehend the practice of LRC in Jiangzhou. Moreover, the validity and reliability of the data were ensured through member check, triangulation and description validity, and the process of data analysis, the identity and stance of the researcher and ethical issues were addressed in this chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

To gain a holistic understanding of the practice of Learning Regular Classes (LRC) in Jiangzhou and uncover the key issues affecting it, the following questions were set to guide the study:

- How is LRC understood and implemented at the school and district levels?
- What are the perspectives and experiences of teachers of LRC?

There are three sections in this chapter, with the first presenting the practice of LRC in three schools and comparing the measures that they have employed. The second section will outline teachers' perceptions towards LRC, dividing them into five sub-themes, namely 'how teachers perceive their roles', 'teachers' attitudes and perceptions of students with special education needs', 'how teachers perceive the parents', 'professional development related to special education needs' and 'teachers' perceptions of policies'. The third section will describe inspectors' perceptions of the implementation of LRC.

4.1 The Practice of Learning in Regular Classes (LRC) in three schools

4.1.1 The practice of Learning in Regular Classes (LRC) in Haihong Primary School

4.1.1.1 Being identified as a student with special education needs (SEN)

Typically, the procedure of being identified as a student with SEN is initiated by class teachers, who upon finding that there were students whose performance differed from others, such as exhibiting behavioural or emotional problems, may report them to the dean of studies, Hong, who is responsible for how LRC operates

in Haihong Primary School. Subsequently, Hong invited several teachers, including a psychology teacher, class teacher and usually an experienced teacher who was currently teaching or had previously taught students with SEN to have a school assessment. After these teachers had reached an agreement, the class teacher would inform the parents of their child's condition and the school policies in relation to LRC to obtain their agreement. Subsequently, material including an application form and a medical report would be delivered to the local special education guidance centre, with another assessment conducted with experts from the local guidance centre, teachers from Haihong Primary School and the parents. Following this assessment, the application form is completed with the endorsement of both Haihong Primary School and the local guidance centre.

4.1.1.2 LRC of Haihong Primary School

LRC of Haihong Primary School primarily comprises three aspects: support from classmates, support from teachers and fostering a non-exclusionary atmosphere.

A formal name has been given to the support received from classmates, namely 'mutual assistance groups', where elite students sit with the student with SEN, and the responsibility of these students is to offer academic and everyday support if necessary. Hong provided an example of this practice:

> ... when it was time for he (a student with SEN) to go for morning exercises, someone would lead him or simply give him a reminder. As for academic work, their level is much lower than the others and they may even find some straightforward questions too difficult to answer, thus the high achieving students are there to help them with his studies. Sometimes, they also remind him to hand in homework as students with SEN need to be reminded. As for activities that they are unable to do, the excellent students would walk them through step-by-step. (Hong, Haihong Primary School, an administrator)

Regarding support from teachers, which in this instance mainly refers to Chinese,

mathematics and psychology teachers, two different descriptions were given. Hong stated that both mathematics and Chinese teachers were expected to offer additional lessons lasting around 15 to 20 minutes every day to students with SEN. The time at which these lessons were held was not fixed and they took place during the lunch break or after school, but the time slot for individualised training conducted in resource rooms was fixed. This training was typically conducted once a week and could be found in curriculum schedules under the name of 'P.E.' or other subjects. Its content consists primarily of sensory integration therapy and an Individualised Education Plan (IEP) produced before the training, yet Zhang (a class teacher) described it differently. Despite the training being offered every lunch break, both Chinese and mathematics teachers provided an extra lesson each week during the time intended for individualised instruction in resource rooms. All of the content was designed based on the student's cognitive levels.

> More exercises on oral arithmetic with numbers up to one hundred will be provided for him this semester... I had originally planned to spend the last two years teaching him more new words but I found that he did not retain those that he learned this semester for the following semester, thus the same words had to be taught repeatedly. I believe that if he could grasp the Chinese phonetic alphabet he could use it to spell new words and recognise them on his own. Therefore, this semester I am teaching him the Chinese phonetic alphabet again. (Zhang, Haihong Primary School, a class teacher)

Students with SEN generally did not go to resource rooms unless they had some 'severe problems', such as one student who was unable to control their behaviours or emotions. In these instances, sensory integration training or psychological guidance was offered to them, hence there are seemingly differences between the design of the training and how it is practised.

As for the classroom environment, class teachers are expected to nurture an atmosphere that is non-exclusionary and conducive to mutual understanding, while they must lead not only the students without disability but their parents to treat

students with SEN equally and be willing to accept them. Moreover, support from elite students was also viewed as an approach to building a non-exclusionary atmosphere.

4.1.2 The practice of Learning in Regular Classes (LRC) in Dongfang Primary School (the special education guidance centre of Fangxian District)

4.1.2.1 Being identified as a student with Special Education Needs (SEN)

The primary purpose of this identification is to ensure that appropriate support is offered for students with SEN, and the procedure related to being identified as a student with SEN in Dongfang Primary School is similar to that of Haihong Primary School, with the only difference being who makes the final decision. In this school, the form receives final approval from the local education bureau based on comments from the guidance centre, whereas in Haihong Primary School, the final decision is made by the local guidance centre.

Moreover, some students with SEN from other schools in Fangxian District are able to receive the educational service from the guidance centre by making an application. Usually, the parents of such students reported their willingness to be educated in the guidance centre, with some materials related to the student subsequently delivered to the guidance centre. The guidance centre tended to accept every student who applied, yet if the number of students exceeded the centre's limit, admissions would be carried out on a chronological basis.

4.1.2.2 LRC in Dongfang Primary School (the special education guidance centre of Fangxian District)

LRC in Dongfang Primary School

Students with SEN were to accept two forms of instruction, with one being rehabilitative training offered by two full-time resource teachers at a fixed time in resource rooms and the other being additional academic lessons offered by Chinese

and mathematics teachers. Occasionally, the additional academic lessons took place in teachers' offices and sometimes was held in resource rooms, but the time slot for additional academic lessons was not as rigid. Sometimes it was conducted during 'P.E' class, while sometimes it was conducted during lunch break, depending on the decision of the teachers. Sun, the vice-principal provided an example involving two children:

> … one of them was particularly disruptive during P.E. class... So, we took him out of the class. As for the other, some lessons were seemingly not very effective for her, so we pulled her out as well...and we found a teacher who was free on Wednesday afternoons, so he was called in. Both lessons are to be carried out once a week for 40 minutes. (Sun, Dongfang Primary School, a vice-principal)

To improve how the instructions are carried out, an Individualised Education Plan (IEP) was to be made for each student, thus an IEP meeting was held by resource teachers. Many items listed in the IEP were discussed during the meeting, such as short-term and long-term targets, while key stakeholders were involved, including parents, the class teacher, course teachers and administrators, and experts from special education schools would occasionally be invited to attend. As for the implementation of IEPs, both the resource and course teachers were required to formulate a teaching plan for each lesson, and at the end of each semester an evaluation was carried out by resource teachers based on parents' feedback and academic achievement reports.

LRC in the special education guidance centre in Fangxian District

Students from other schools were sent to the guidance centre by their parents, with the lessons typically given once a week for approximately one or two hours. The content of the lessons is based on students' unique needs, such as those with mild mental retardation taking sensory integration lessons to train their coordination ability and those with autism having social classes to improve their social skills, with both individualised and group instructions offered.

4.1.3 The practice of Learning in Regular Classes (LRC) in Zipu Primary School

4.1.3.1 Being identified as a student with Special Education Needs (SEN)

Compared with Haihong Primary School and Dongfang Primary School, the process is seemingly considerably easier in Zipu Primary School. While students who had disability certificates were identified as students with SEN, those whose behaviour appeared different from others tended to be reported to resource teachers by their class teachers. The resource teachers would then inform the parents of the school's LRC policy and guide them to complete a form which was viewed as permission to receive the educational service of resource rooms. Neither the guidance centre nor the local education bureau were involved in the procedure, with their only role being to record student information.

4.1.3.2 LRC in Zipu Primary School

In Zipu Primary School, three types of measures were taken to help students with SEN to better adapt to school life. Firstly, an elite classmate, the 'little assistant', would sit with the students and offer support to them both in terms of their studies and daily lives. Secondly, course teachers lowered the difficulty of the exercises or even did not require the students to complete them if their learning difficulties meant that they were far beyond students' cognitive levels. Thirdly, resource teachers offered individualised or group lessons once or twice a week for forty minutes and their content was primarily about sensory integration and cognitive training. In terms of the time, the lessons were carried out during a class called club activities, with every student moving to different classrooms to attend various clubs, and those with SEN moved to resource rooms but occasionally their lessons were conducted in other venues. Yimei, a resource teacher, provided an example:

> Wang is a student who I am teaching and he is very interested in playing basketball. Sometimes we go to the playground and combine sensory integration training and playing basketball. (Yimei, Zipu Primary School,

a resource teacher)

Similar to Dongfang Primary School, an Individualised Education Plan (IEP) was made based on the hobbies and characteristics of each student. Moreover, a parent school which served as a bridge linking both parents and the school was utilised as a means of disseminating knowledge related to special education and obtaining feedback from parents. Unlike the measures employed in Haihong Primary School and Zipu Primary School, there were no additional academic lessons offered to students, with course teachers instead lowering the requirements in terms of exercise.

4.1.4 Comparing the practice of LRC in the three schools

Regarding the practice of LRC in each school, all of the support was guided by IEPs, with support from resource teachers, course teachers and students being three measures frequently taken in these schools. Support from resource teachers primarily concerns individualised instruction conducted in resource rooms and despite all three schools offering lessons, their frequency differed; twice a week in Zipu Primary School, once a week in Dongfang Primary School and in Haihong Primary School it was only if students were experiencing severe problems.

Concerning the content of the lesson, sensory integration training was mentioned by all three schools. Support from course teachers came largely in the form of additional academic lessons offered by mathematics and Chinese teachers seeking to help students with SEN to make progress academically. Nevertheless, the timing of the lesson was not fixed, resulting in teachers having to sacrifice their break times. Support from students, particularly elite ones, was also a measure taken by the school to conduct LRC and create a non-exclusionary atmosphere.

Moreover, regarding the procedure of being identified as a student with SEN, which was described in the documentation presented in Chapter 3 (see Chapter 3, Section 3.3.2.3), the procedure of Zipu Primary School seemed to differ somewhat from the rest. None of the staff from the local special education guidance centre or local educational departments were involved, yet some were supposed to be. Hence, Zipu

Primary School was the worst and Dongfang Primary School the best in terms of access to external resources given that the local guidance centre is located in Dongfang Primary School.

4.2 How is LRC Perceived by Teachers

People's beliefs and actions are intertwined to such a degree that they usually affect each other. Therefore, teachers' educational beliefs and their comprehension of LRC impact their actions when implementing it. In this section, teachers' perceptions of their roles, teachers' attitudes towards students with Special Education Needs (SEN), teachers' perceptions of parents, teachers' professional development related to SEN and their perceptions of LRC policy will be presented and discussed.

4.2.1 How teachers perceive their roles

4.2.1.1 Class teachers' perceptions

Conveying academics

Every class teacher in this research happens to be a Chinese teacher. Chinese is one of the main subjects during primary school, hence it attracts significant attention from schools and parents. Even though some class teachers offered individualised instruction for students with SEN, all of the teachers believed that their main responsibility was teaching Chinese and helping students to achieve high academic performance. Nonetheless, in terms of educating students with SEN, some may think that it is the responsibility of resource teachers, thus throughout the interview, there were rarely any descriptions of modified curricula or alternative instructions for students with SEN studying in regular classrooms, with Chun, a class teacher, claiming that:

> We have so many students, therefore we cannot only take care of him (a student with SEN) and ignore the others. We should prioritise the needs of the majority of the students. (Chun, Zipu Primary School, a class teacher)

Therefore, in regular classrooms the class teachers' main responsibility was to help the majority of the students with their studies rather than all of them. Moreover, they made it plain that students with special education needs are simply physically present in regular classrooms, stating that:

> ...the content we are learning is totally beyond his cognitive levels and he cannot understand the content in the textbook, therefore he cannot take part in class discussions. All he can do is just sit, look and listen. (Zhang, Haihong Primary School, a class teacher)

Playing multiple roles

Class teachers play a crucial role in the Chinese education system, particularly during the primary school period, and it is believed that an effective class teacher usually leads to a good class which is disciplined and has high academic achievement. To clarify the responsibilities of a class teacher, the Ministry of Education published a regulation, *Work Regulations of Class Teachers in Primary and Middle schools* in 2009. Article Nine states:

> Class teachers should manage the daily affairs of the class, maintain the good order of the class; cultivate students' sense of rules, sense of responsibility and sense of collective honour; and create a collective atmosphere of democracy, harmony, solidarity, mutual help, health and progress (Ministry of Education, 2009).

From the interviews with class teachers, it became evident that in spite of the responsibilities listed above, when there are students with special education needs in the class teachers need to play multiple roles to maintain a 'non-exclusionary' and 'harmonious' classroom.

Detectors: Due to the 'no rejection' policy, schools must enrol all children who live nearby without any additional requirements. As for parents, most are unwilling to let

schools know about problems that their children may have, hence some may be aware of the conditions of their children but choose to conceal them, while some are unaware. Therefore, schools rarely obtain information about 'special students' from their parents, with these 'potential special students' usually detected by class teachers.

> Initially, we suspected that these two children may be a little different, and following a period of observation, their class teacher found that they required additional support and reported the situation to us. (Sun, Dongfang Primary School, a vice principal)

> ... only once have we found a student who may have some problems through their parents, which was when the class teacher made a home visit and found that the mother was above the average age for giving birth when she had him. The mother informed her that she also had an older son who was not healthy, which led her to having another one. We understood the condition of this student but we were unable to refuse him, and while it is usually acceptable for a family to have an elder sister and little brother, if both children are boys the regulations of the one-child policy need to be satisfied when producing the second baby. (Hong, Haihong Primary School, an administrator)

In the past, there was a tacit agreement which was supplementary to the one-child policy. In some areas of China, particularly in rural ones, it was allowed to have two children when the first was a girl or had particular health problems.

Persuaders: Being identified as a student with special education needs required parental approval, hence without thus students were unable to enjoy additional support from schools, but obtaining permission from parents is not straightforward. Parents commonly refused this identification as they were reluctant to admit the problems of their children and felt shamed or lost face, and parents thought that being identified in such a fashion was equivalent to being labelled, thereby causing their children to be treated unfairly by both teachers and classmates. To eliminate

parents' concerns and worries, class teachers had to play the role of persuader, which they did orally most of the time. For instance, class teachers contacted parents and provided them with information about LRC, including approaches to protecting students' privacy, the benefits students are able to enjoy and successful examples of it in practice. They also invited parents to resource room visits and further explained the differences between accepting individualised instructions and receiving no tutoring, yet occasionally they had to persuade them through practical actions.

> After almost a year of observation, we found that some students were seemingly different from their peers, so we invited the parents to interviews. They were usually not willing to accept what we were saying, and they usually found various reasons or excuses for their children's problems, or they even held the opposite opinion. At that stage, all that we could do is offer the students additional instruction, such as positive habits training. After almost a year of such training, we held discussions with the parents again and asked them whether they had found any progress in their children. The parents noticed the efforts that the teachers had made for their children and stated that 'my child made some progress', which allowed us to have further discussions and obtain more information about the students. (Hong, Haihong Primary School, an administrator)

'Firemen' for sudden affairs: As stated in the regulations above, one responsibility of class teachers is to maintain order in the classroom, yet students identified as having Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), emotional problems or behavioural problems may hinder attempts to do this. Specifically, they may leave their seats or cry for no reason, have quarrels with other students, break others' belongings or physically hurt others because they are unable to control their behaviour.

> They cannot sit quietly or listen to teachers and they always disturb others, therefore I frequently need to deal with 'sudden events' caused by these two children. (Zhang, Haihong Primary School, a class teacher)

Although some students with SEN do not have issues with their emotions or behaviour, they may nonetheless cause disturbances in class. Given that most of the time they were isolated from the rest of the class and had nothing to do, they sought to attract attention by disturbing others. These students may behave well when they are with class teachers. However, when they are in other teachers' classes, their disruptive behaviour may cause teachers to feel distressed, therefore class teachers are required to turn up as soon as possible to deal with these sudden issues.

> ...But in other lessons such as English or music, his behaviour is terrible, which influences the discipline of the whole class and teachers usually feel distressed about it. Therefore, I usually need to deal with these things after class. (Qiu, Dongfang Primary School, a class teacher)

4.2.1.2 Resource teachers' perceptions

Part-time resource teacher's perceptions

As mentioned before, resource teachers involved in the research could be divided into two parts: part-time and full-time. There are 374 resource teachers in Jiangzhou but only three are full-time, and the rest are part-time, which means that the majority of the resource teachers not only work as resource teachers but also as course teachers, while their perceptions towards their roles differ based on the nature of their work. Taking Yiwei as an example, he is a resource teacher in Zipu Primary School and a mathematics and class teacher for Grade Four. Although he has been identified as a key figure of resource teachers in Zixian District, he is convinced that being a class teacher and teaching mathematics are his primary responsibilities.

> ...actually, there is a lot of work to do in terms of LRC but we have no time to do it. Being a class teacher and teaching maths are my main responsibilities and my workload for these roles remains the same despite my position as a resource teacher. Also, I need to taken on as many lessons as any other teacher does. (Yiwei, Zipu Primary School, a resource

teacher)

Therefore, it is evident that although Yiwei seems to have had some success as a resource teacher, his main responsibilities continue to be managing a class and teaching mathematics, while the workload of educating students with special education needs is not counted, thus his workload as a resource teacher is not recognised by the school. Furthermore, Yiwei stated that he had fourteen mathematics lessons in regular classrooms and one individualised instruction in a resource room each week, thus the number of lessons conducted in resource rooms occupied only a minor part of his total amount of work, with the majority being mathematics teaching.

Full-time resource teachers' perceptions

Qin is a full-time resource teacher both for Dongfang Primary School and the special education guidance centre of Fangxian District, and offering individualised instruction to students with special education needs and support to other mainstream schools intending to implement LRC are her main responsibilities.

Resource teachers are required to offer individualised instructions to students with SEN, designing lessons based on the specific needs of each student. The content of their classes is focused on defect compensation, which primarily involves sensory integration training, rehabilitation training, psychological guidance, communication skills and living skills. Qin is a full-time resource teacher and her primary responsibility is offering individualised instruction for students from both Dongfang Primary School and throughout Fangxian District as she holds two positions; one in Dongfang Primary School and another in the special education guidance centre of Fangxian District.

> I have 12-14 lessons each week. In the morning, I am responsible for individualised instructions for students in Dongfang Primary School. In the afternoon, I offer individualised instructions to students of other schools in Fangxian District. (Qin, Dongfang Primary School, a resource

teacher)

As well as providing individualised lessons for students with special education needs, she was also expected to offer guidance or training to other teachers. Compared with part-time resource teachers, she was deemed to be more knowledgeable and experienced in special education needs, and Qin ultimately provided guidance or training for resource teachers of other schools. For instance, she helped them to select appropriate rooms and equipment for the construction of resource rooms and she taught teachers how to use the equipment.

4.2.1.3 Vice-principals (Administrators)

From the interviews with the three vice-principals (administrators), it was found that they played different roles in their respective schools.

Hong is the dean of studies and is accountable for LRC in Haihong Primary School. In her interviews, she explained how they implemented it, the problems they had encountered and the achievements that they had made, providing useful examples. As well as offering support to the teachers, she provided a lot of evidence of her contribution as an administrator and usually used ‘we’ or ‘I’ rather than ‘they’ or ‘she’. For example,

> Take the student I am teaching as an example...we assessed the student first... (Hong, Haihong Primary School, an administrator)

Sun is the vice principal of Dongfang Primary School and the director and founder of the special education guidance centre in Fangxian District. During the school visit, the author found a booklet outlining the work of the guidance centre, providing an abundance of information on it, such as its origins, the obligations of resource teachers and the rules for using resource rooms. Qin, a resource teacher, advised that this booklet was compiled by Sun. Moreover, Qiu mentioned that:

> ...despite that, Sun requires us to prepare a teaching plan before classes.

(Qiu, Dongfang Primary School, a class teacher)

Therefore, Sun occupied the role of policymaker both for Haihong Primary School and the guidance centre.

Yang is also the vice-principal of Zipu Primary School and holds more of a supporting role than being heavily involved in LRC work. In his interview he did not provide much detail about his interaction with students with special education needs; instead he addressed the funding for the construction of resource rooms and the training opportunities for resource teachers.

> We spent a further 100,000 RMB to add equipment for resource rooms and I believe you have seen that no matter whether it is in relation to area or equipment, our school is at the top of the rankings in Zixian District. Another matter on which we have spent a lot of money is training for teachers, specifically for resource teachers, which we have arranged many times, sending relevant teachers to Hangzhou and other cities to take part. The professional knowledge of the resource teachers in our school has developed rapidly as a consequence, such as Mr Chen, Ms Zheng and Ms Wang. They have all performed outstandingly well in the work of resource rooms and been leading figures in Zixian District. (Yang, Zipu Primary School, a vice- principal)

Moreover, from the interviews with the resource teacher of Zipu Primary School it was clear from his discussion of their resource teacher group that there was no vice-principal involved, and only one administrator.

4.2.2 Teachers' attitudes and perceptions of students with Special Education Needs (SEN)

4.2.2.1 Class teachers' attitudes and perceptions of students with Special Education Needs (SEN)

Class teachers' attitudes

The class teachers involved in the study had varying amounts of work experience; Zhang had fourteen years, Qiu had three years and Chun had twenty years. Zhang is a class teacher of Grade Three and she has one student in her class who has been identified as having special education needs and two others who may also have special education needs but have not yet been identified. Although these three students were reported to have learning disabilities, from the interview it was clear that their behavioural problems were the most significant issue. Qiu is a class teacher of Grade Four and there are two students in her class with mild mental retardation who have not performed well in their studies but can take care of themselves at school. Chun is a class teacher of Grade Six and one student in her class has moderate mental retardation. As well as problems in relation to poor academic performance, he also requires others' help in his daily school routines. For instance, one classmate was responsible for retrieving food for him and one led him to the playground to carry out morning exercise.

From the interviews, it was evident that class teachers' attitudes towards students with SEN are different, with Zhang and Chun's attitudes being negative, while Qiu's attitude is more neutral. When discussing the performance of students with special education needs, many negative words, such as 'poor' and 'can't' were used by Zhang and Chun. Particularly, from Chun's description, she used 'cannot' four times and concluded that the student had low ability in every aspect. From the tone of her voice, she was seemingly unsatisfied with the student.

> He has a poor memory and always forgets what he has been taught. Learning Chinese requires memorising a lot of knowledge, so he learns it very slowly. Moreover, he has poor coordination in running and he was not able to skip rope before this semester, therefore he has not passed the P.E. examination in the last two years…(Zhang, Haihong Primary School, a class teacher)

> He cannot have dinner by himself or do morning exercises and he has

> poor coordination ability. Also, he cannot write his own name, while there are many things that he cannot do and he has lower abilities than the others in every aspect. (Chun, Zipu Primary School, a class teacher)

When Qiu described two students in her school, she outlined both their strengths and weaknesses in a calm tone. Moreover, when describing the disadvantages, she usually spoke in a euphemistic manner by using 'may'.

> Compared with other students, their grades may be much worse. For example, if a test paper is scored out of one hundred points, he may only achieve a single-digit score, and now they are in Grade Four, it is more and more difficult...And in terms of their daily life... I don't think it's a big problem. They can take care of themselves. (Qiu, Dongfang Primary School, a class teacher)

There may be two reasons for the difference between the attitudes of Qiu and the other two teachers. Firstly, students have different categories and degrees of disability, hence even though there are two students with SEN in Qiu's class, both are able to take care of themselves and they have no behavioural issues, with Qiu even commenting that one of the students was obedient and well-behaved. Secondly, Qiu was interviewed in Sun's office, with Sun sitting in close proximity, thus compared with the other two class teachers, Qiu may have been more careful with her words.

Influence on the class

When discussing the influence that students with SEN had on the class, I initially anticipated that one or two teachers may mention how they benefited it, yet none of them did. Instead they focused on their negative impact, with all of them indicating that they had no impact other than disturbing others and lowering the average academic performance of the class, thereby demonstrating that students with SEN were only accepted conditionally.

> If he does not attack others, he has no influence on the class... (Zhang, Haihong Primary School, a class teacher)

> He would have no influence if his academic performance was not being included with the rest of the class...he can sit silently in class and he rarely disturbs others... At least he does not walk around the classroom during class as this would disturb others. (Chun, Zipu Primary School, a class teacher)

Unable to be educated in regular classes

All three class teachers agreed that students with SEN cannot be educated in regular classes because the content that students without disability learn is totally beyond their cognitive levels and they are unable to keep up. Therefore, teachers resorted to additional academic lessons for students with SEN and designed academic content based on their level of ability.

> ...the content we are learning is far beyond his cognitive levels and he cannot even understand the content in the textbook. He cannot take part in classroom discussions... (Zhang, Haihong Primary School, a class teacher)

> ...in a test paper marked out of 100, these two students were only able to register around 10 and they are now Grade-Four-students. The academic challenges are increasing greatly and it might be a great challenge for them...It is really hard for them to catch up to the levels required in Grade-Four, so the content of the extra lessons is based on their own ability. (Qiu, Dongfang Primary School, a class teacher)

Moreover, Chun employed a rather different approach by advising parents to transfer their child to a special education school due to poor academic performance. One possible reason is that course teachers are not required to offer individualised instruction to students with special education needs in Zipu Primary School, hence the student did not obtain any academic support. As a consequence, it is very

difficult for him to make progress, thus the class teacher believed that a mainstream school was inappropriate for him. As well as academic issues, the class teacher believed that the student could not be educated in a mainstream school due to problematic behaviours and habits, stating:

> ...Occasionally, he would disturb his deskmate or pull others' clothes... He just wants to attract others' attention and wants someone to talk to. I have told my students that 'you can treat him like a sister or brother who is 3 or 4 years old but you cannot bully him.' Occasionally, he steals classmates' belongings, like their pencils, and they allow him to do it. (Chun, Zipu Primary School, a class teacher)

The student that Chun is referring to above is in Grade six and he might be a tall boy, yet he is treated by classmates as though he were their 3 or 4-year-old brother, reflecting that he receives unfair treatment in the class.

4.2.2.2 Resource teachers' and vice-principals' (administrators) attitudes and perceptions in relation to students with special education needs (SEN)

The dominant feeling of vice-principals (administrators) and resource teachers for students with SEN is sympathy. Although there were no questions asked directly about their perceptions of students with SEN, they showed compassion for them when giving responses, with some sympathising with those students because they were typically isolated in regular classes without any support.

> It is very miserable for students to have to sit still in classes and be unable to move or concentrate on what the teachers are saying. They might become frustrated if they receive no additional support from resource rooms. (Yiwei, Zipu Primary School, a resource teacher)

Some felt sympathy due to poor treatment from their families, particularly in large ones with more than one child where the child with SEN tended to be ignored by their parents.

> ...Another family also has three children, with two being twins. The parents sent one of the twins to live with another family but she was soon returned due to her low cognitive level. The twins study in the same class but we found that their parents treat them quite differently; they are kind to the younger sister and the older one, yet they treat her like a dog. They think that their only responsibility is to give her something to eat. (Hong, Haihong Primary School, an administrator)

4.2.3 How teachers perceive the parents

Both the parents of students with Special Education Needs (SEN) and those without disability are stakeholders in LRC as their attitudes and perceptions towards students with SEN may influence its success.

4.2.3.1 The attitudes of parents of students without disability

From the interviews with teachers, parents of students without disability generally held neutral or positive attitudes towards those with SEN with the condition that their children's teaching was not hindered. However, once they felt that their children were being distracted by students with SEN, they were likely to hold negative attitudes or put pressure on teachers to segregate them from their children. Zhang reported that two students in the class have behavioural problems and frequently disturb others, which has caused the parents to demand that their children are not their deskmates, therefore the seating arrangement in the class has posed a considerable challenge for Zhang.

> Because of having children like them in the class, I spend a lot of energy dealing with the parents of other students. It is understandable that they would prefer the top students to be their children's deskmates and none of them want these two children to sit with theirs. I told the parents that if no one wants to sit with these two children, they will have nowhere to sit, therefore I usually change the seating plan every semester, with students

> taking turns to sit with these two children. (Zhang, Haihong Primary School, a class teacher)
>
> I changed the seat layout in the afternoon, which caused a parent to rush to the school arguing that placing such a student to sit with his daughter meant that she could not fully listen to the teachers for the whole semester. If this girl gets injured or harmed in some way because of her deskmate, I am afraid that I will have to spend a lot of time negotiating with her parents. (Zhang, Haihong Primary School, a class teacher)

4.2.3.2 The attitudes of parents of students with Special Education Needs (SEN)

Regarding the parents of students with SEN, most were reluctant to confront the problems that their children were experiencing. Some were aware of the condition of their children but chose to conceal it, whereas others became suspicious or gave various excuses when informed that their children's behaviour was different from others.

> The parents were usually unwilling to accept what we said and they usually found various reasons for their children's problems or held the opposite opinion to us. (Hong, Haihong Primary School, an administrator)
>
> Some parents may feel shamed or lose face initially because their children were labelled as students with special education needs. (Yiwei, Zipu Primary School, a resource teacher)
>
> ...the parents were still reluctant to face the facts. They told me that 'my child has made progress and he actually knows everything'. (Chun, Zipu Primary School, a resource teacher)

There may be two reasons for this. As Yiwei stated, parents may 'feel shamed' or 'lose face' if they have a child with special education needs, while they may be concerned that their children may be treated unfairly due to being identified as

students with SEN. Considering parents' concerns, teachers were diligent about protecting the privacy of these students, such as building all of the resource rooms on the top level rather than the bottom as required in the regulatory documentation, with the purpose being to ensure that the students would not be readily seen when receiving instruction in resource rooms. In Zipu Primary School, the lessons in the resource rooms were deliberately fixed to coincide with the time allocated for club activities.

> We also promised that their children would not be labelled. Children taking individualised instructions in resource rooms is the same as others taking part in club activities. At the time of those lessons, all the students were supposed to leave their classroom and go to other rooms, with students with special education needs relocating to resource rooms (Yiwei, Zipu Primary School, a resource teacher).

4.2.3.3 Lack of parental involvement

Assessments or IEP meetings enabled the author to understand the involvement of parents. When asked whether the parents of the students with SEN took part in the additional support or lessons at school, no affirmative answer was given, with the main reason being the parents' belief 'that educating students was the responsibility of teachers, not them' (Hong's words). Only one mother was reported as getting involved, but she finally dropped out due to unsatisfactory results.

> ...there was only one mom who paid much attention to her child. In the beginning, she was in high spirits and made a temporary school pass to gain access to the school, but after a period of training, she may have found that her child had made little progress or she may have been busy with her work, so... (Hong, Haihong Primary School, an administrator)

As well as the lack of parental involvement at school, the support that they received at home was also insufficient, with teachers stating that some parents of children with SEN paid insufficient attention to their children. Hong attributed this to the low

economic status of their families and the low academic background of their parents, with most students in Haihong Primary School being from migrant families. Their families prioritised earning money and some parents both took multiple jobs, thus they had no time to take care of their children. Moreover, some parents believed that their responsibility was to ensure their children had food to eat rather than giving them an education.

> As for one of the parents, he does not care about anything related to his child, including teaching him. Every time I talk to him, he just responds with 'OK, OK, OK'. (Zhang, Haihong Primary School, a class teacher)

> Taking the student that I am teaching as an example, the whole family migrated from northern Suzhou and the parents are responsible for cleaning a road which requires a 24 hour cleaning system to be operated and overseen. Moreover, they also provide cleaning services for other families, therefore they do not have additional time to take care of their children. (Zhang, Haihong Primary School, a class teacher)

> ...Another family which has three children, with two of them being twins... think they are only responsible for giving their children something to eat, and as for school matters, it is up to their teachers. For such parents, it is sufficient if they approve the LRC practice in the school, hence they cannot be expected to spend time looking after their children. (Hong, Haihong Primary School, an administrator)

The parental support from Zipu Primary School was also limited but some measures were taken by the school to increase parents' involvement. According to Yiwei, to enable parents to gain a better understanding of special education needs, resource teachers invited them to be assistants to teachers, attend lectures concerning special education needs and have interviews with teachers through a parent school, but their enthusiasm was seemingly quite low.

> Parents... some active ones participated several times but some parents are

busy so they did not attend any. (Yiwei, Zipu Primary School, a resource teacher).

4.2.4 Professional development related to Special Education Needs (SEN)

4.2.4.1 Limited opportunities for training

Since 2012, more than 400000RMB per year has been spent by Jiangzhou Education Bureau on special education training. Initially, the training was largely open to teachers working at special education schools, but following the announcement of *the 2014-2016 Promotion Plan of Special Education of Jianzghou*, resource teachers could participate in training concerning special education (General Office of Jiangzhou Municipal People's Government, 2013). Thereafter, at least one training for resource teachers has been promised annually and all these are organised by the special education guidance centre at the municipal and district levels.

The training is usually conducted in the following manner: the guidance centre at the municipal level publishes a notice that includes the topic of the training, the time, the place and the requirements for participants, with this notice subsequently sent to each mainstream school through the district guidance centre. To guarantee each training's efficiency, the number of participants is limited to 60, and there are ten districts in Jiangzhou, hence there are around six training places for each district, meaning that only six schools in each district have a teacher as a representative taking part in the training. Using Fangxian District as an example, it is the smallest district in Jiiangzhou yet it still has 110 schools, including primary schools, junior middle schools and kindergartens, thus there is even less representation for the larger districts.

Recently, the urgent need to enhance the professional skills and knowledge of resource teachers has attracted the attention of the provincial educational department. Provincial training and competitions concerning resource teachers have been held since 2020, which has had a considerable influence in terms of promoting the professional skills of resource teachers. Similar to the training at the city level, only

two teachers from each district are allowed to participate in the provincial training.

There are three levels of official training concerning LRC: provincial, municipal and district, with all of the training carried out by the special education guidance centres at each level. Even though only resource teachers mentioned their experience of official training in the interviews, other participants focused more on training held by the school or other organisations, which reflects that the number of official trainings offered is insufficient given the demand for it.

> ... At that time, I participated in the training concerning LRC in Shanghai. This training was designed for resource teachers and was closely related to our work. (Qin, Dongfang Primary School, a resource teacher)

> Something that we have spent a lot of money on is the training for teachers. We arranged a lot of training for resource teachers and also sent teachers to Hangzhou and other cities to take part in the training. (Yang, Zipu Primary School, a vice-principal)

4.2.4.2 Impractical and irrelevant content

Despite the limited training opportunities, some teachers reflected that even though they had attended some training, it was insufficient for them in terms of preparing them well for implementing LRC because some of the training was unpractical. They were seeking systemic and closely-related training that brought together theoretical and practical elements.

> Despite taking part in some training sessions beforehand, they were similar to theoretical lectures, so they were useful but not very practical. The teachers were looking forward to systematic training which combined both theory and practice. (Hong, Haihong Primary School, an administrator)

> ...Then we also took part in a series of class observations and lectures

> which were largely concerned with special education and found that it was not closely related to the work we were doing. (Qin, Dongfang Primary School, a resource teacher)

A possible reason for this discrepancy is that the hosts of the official training are special education guidance centres at provincial, municipal and district levels, and the majority of these centres are built in special education schools, hence the staff are also from these schools and they have very limited knowledge about LRC due to the parallel education systems of regular and special education schools. They may believe that students with special education needs are similar to those at special education schools, therefore they invited resource teachers to attend training which has been tailored to special education teachers.

Moreover, despite in-service training, one of the vice principals suggested forming a professional supporting team for the practice of LRC.

> Consulting experts is also a form of learning, yet the reality is that there are no experts of the practice of LRC in Jiangzhou...It would be good to create a professional group so that if we had any questions we could consult experts online, which would be very convenient for both parties. (Hong, Haihong Primary School, an administrator)

4.2.5 Teachers' perceptions of LRC

When participants were asked about their understanding and perception towards LRC, all of the teachers concluded that LRC is beneficial for students with SEN, but for teachers it has a rather different impact.

4.2.5.1 Positive for life adaption but negative for studies

The primary measure taken by the three schools in terms of the practice of LRC is offering individualised instruction, which comprised two aspects. One focused on academic achievements and was offered by course teachers, with the other helping

students to better adapt to their school and social lives, usually taking place in resource rooms. From the responses of teachers, almost all of them expressed their concern about the low academic achievements of students with SEN, which was despite them having spent a great deal of time and energy providing additional academic support.

> As for his studies, he can do oral calculations below the number 20, and within 100 is also OK for him. He is improving slowly. (Zhang, Haihong Primary School, a class teacher)

> As a teacher, I really hope that they can make progress in their studies as a lot of time and energy has gone in to providing extra lessons for them yet there has been a little effect. Taking maths as an example, it remains very difficult for them to complete addition and subtraction problems below the number twenty. (Qiu, Dongfang Primary School, a class teacher)

> In terms of their studies, there has been no progress at all. (Chun, Zipu Primary School, a class teacher)

It is understandable that students with SEN have not made progress in terms of academics given that they were offered lessons only once or twice a week based on their learning disabilities and the majority of the time they were simply physically present in regular classrooms without receiving any additional support. Thus, it is unreasonable to expect these students to have made progress after only one or two lessons a week.

When the words used by the class teachers to describe students' academic performances were compared, there was little difference between 'improving slowly' (Zhang's words), 'a little effect' (Qiu's words) and 'no progress at all' (Chun's words). Only Chun reported a wholly negative result, which may be related to the practice of LRC in Zipu Primary School. As stated, there were no additional academic lessons offered in Zipu Primary School, with group or individualised instruction from resource teachers being their only offering. Yiwei, the resource

teacher of Zipu Primary School, stated that in resource rooms with a grade-three student he only taught very basic knowledge, such as colours and shapes, which is knowledge that kindergarten pupils should have. Therefore, these kinds of instructions are useless when it comes to catching up with classmates in terms of their studies.

In contrast, the results of other aspects such as communication skills, self-confidence and self-care abilities were positive, which was confirmed by many participants. Zhang mentioned one boy who had behavioural problems but had made great progress, remarking that 'he sometimes disturbed others but it would be handled after class or he would recognise his indiscretion immediately after being reminded'. Despite these behavioural problems, his communication skills and coordination abilities had improved.

> They have just finished the P.E. examination and he could skip rope more than eighty times, which is something he has made great progress in. Due to of this great progress, he passed the P.E. examination... When he was a Grade one student, he only spoke to his classmates but said nothing to the teachers. Even when he was asked by teachers to answer questions, he remained silent. Now he is able to say something to teachers. (Zhang, Haihong Primary School, a class teacher)

Similarly, the positive results were also confirmed by teachers from two other schools, with Qin from Dongfang Primary School stating that those who had received educational services in resource rooms had progressed considerably. She also concluded that the sensory integration training was very helpful for those with mild mental retardation.

> I think it can be helpful, especially for those ... (with) mild mental retardation, such as one of our students. The resource classroom of his own school had not been built yet and was still under construction, so he came to our resource centre. It was obvious that after the training, especially the sensory training, he had improved a lot. (Qin, Dongfang

Primary School, a resource teacher)

Yiwei from Zipu Primary School provided positive examples of self-care ability and interpersonal communication, stating that:

> one student who previously did not dare to look up at the teacher began to take the initiative to greet teachers. Perhaps it was not just his communication skills that had improved but also his confidence. (Yiwei, Zipu Primary School, a resource teacher)

Moreover, Yang also mentioned two specific examples with great pride.

> One student called Tang had already graduated from the school, but his main problem was that he could not walk, thus Yiwei, a resource teacher, set up a series of training sessions for him. Finally, he was able to walk independently but with a little difficulty. Another example is a student called Wang, who when initially going to the school did not speak any words and was very quiet. It seemed he was totally in his own world without being able to make a connection with anyone else, but after several years of training, he was a little more outgoing and willing to communicate with other students and teachers. (Yang, Zipu Primary School, a vice-principal)

4.2.5.2 Individual difference in understanding of the LRC

Pressure for class teachers

Each class teacher expressed the pressure that they felt due to having students with SEN in their classes, but the causes of their pressure are different.

As for Zhang, her pressure mainly originates from the parents of students without disability. As two students in her class had behavioural problems and frequently disturbed others or even attacked them, she was obligated to deal with ‘sudden

events', while also explaining to parents of students without disability what had occurred. She expressed that 'with children like them, I had to spend a lot of energy dealing with the parents of other students'. Even the dean of the studies felt her pressure and remarked:

> The practice of the LRC policy has to some extent brought significant pressure, particularly for class teachers, as they sometimes need to handle pressure both from the students and parents. There was a student who had serious behavioural problems and he was prone to losing control at any time and potentially harming others. Even when the student was confronted by his class teacher, he could still not calm down, so the teacher would wait until he had finished venting his emotions, then she would have a talk with him. Moreover, the class teacher also had to explain the situation to the parents of other students. (Hong, Haihong Primary School, an administrator)

Regarding Qiu, her pressure is largely from the poor academic achievements of these two students with special education needs, and she expressed:

> I feel stressed because I have two students in my class and they are both very emotional and naive. But as a teacher, I really hope they are able to make some progress in their studies. (Qiu, Dongfang Primary School, a class teacher)

As for Chun, her pressure mainly comes from a change to an unwritten rule of LRC which previously held that the scores of students with SEN would be excluded from the class. Chun expressed:

> ...his academic achievements (the student with SEN) had not been counted in the previous five years but I recently heard that they would be included. If his scores were counted, the average score of the whole class would be influenced. (Chun, Zipu Primary School, a class teacher)

These words were repeated on three occasions during the interview by Chun, who is a Chinese teacher of Grade Six and the class she was teaching would be attending a primary school graduation examination soon thereafter. In the examination, both the scores of the class and the school were likely to be ranked. As a Chinese teacher, she cared deeply about the result of this examination.

Good reputation for schools

Compared with class teachers, vice-principals (administrators) tended to hold more positive attitudes towards LRC. Yang, a vice-principal from Zipu Primary School remarked that their school had gained a positive reputation due to the practice of LRC.

> The practice of LRC has been one of the hallmarks of the school and it has helped the school to gain a good reputation among the public. The school began to implement the LRC programme early when there were only five schools in Zixian District doing likewise. After several years of practice, we won great recognition among the parents of students with SEN. (Yang, Zipu Primary School, a vice-principal)

Moreover, both Sun and Qin mentioned that the parents of students with SEN frequently expressed a strong willingness to attend the individualised instruction in resource rooms, with some even asking for more lessons due to the positive results. This indicated that the positive impacts of the practice of LRC had been recognised by the parents.

> He (a student with SEN) is making great progress... So their parents asked for more instruction. (Qin, Dongfang Primary School, a resource teacher)

More tolerance and patience

Additionally, both vice-principles (administrators) and resource teachers reported that teachers were likely to be more tolerant and patient towards students with SEN

and students with low academic levels due to the implementation of LRC.

> Originally, it was not understood or accepted by teachers as the class became a mess with the inclusion of those students (students with SEN), with some teachers even deeming them to be burdens. However, so far all the teachers have been willing to accept and support those students. (Hong, Haihong Primary School, an administrator)

> Since the school has implemented LRC, teachers have taken part in many related lectures and a good deal of training, making teachers more inclusive towards students, not only to those with special education needs but to those with low academic levels. (Sun, Dongfang Primary School, a vice-principal)

> ...working as a resource teacher also affects my attitude as I have become more tolerant and patient towards low academic level students in my class and the communication with their parents has improved. (Yiwei, Zipu Primary School, a resource teacher).

The statements above reflect that the practice of LRC constitutes a positive cycle as the greater the teachers' involvement, the more inclusive they will be. Hence, they are required to learn more about special education needs as this would render both their attitudes and actions more inclusive.

High investment but low reward

Both class and resource teachers were expected to offer educational services for students with SEN, but the time for doing so was not fixed in the schedules, thus teachers had to make time for the additional lessons or sacrifice their break time.

> I usually give them additional lessons on Monday afternoons because I do not have other lessons at that time. (Qiu, Dongfang Primary School, a resource teacher)

> We do not have any other time. We pay attention to him every lunchtime and remind him to review his work and reach out to classmates for help. (Zhang, Haihong Primary School, a class teacher)

> To help students with SEN make some progress academically, they are given extra lessons every day lasting 15 to 20 minutes, yet the time slot for these lessons is not fixed. Sometimes they are at noon and other times after school, but 15 minutes must be guaranteed for them. (Hong, Haihong Primary School, an administrator)

> To not clash with the lessons during school time, these extra lessons were settled at lunchtime or after school. (Yang, Zipu Primary School, a vice-principal)

Regarding these four statements, two are from class teachers and two from leaders (an administrator and a vice-principal). From the class teachers' words, it was evident that they were very busy since both mentioned that 'I do not have any other time'. In contrast, the administrator and the vice-principal seemed to take working during lunch time and after school for granted, using the words 'must be guaranteed' and 'were settled at'. Moreover, although teachers' regular workload remained the same even with additional academic lessons for students with SEN, the subsidy for them was low, 20 to 25 RMB per lesson. During the interviews, none of the class or resource teachers complained about the low payment, with only Sun expressing directly that:

> In fact, their subsidy at the end of each month is not significant. I calculated that it is according to their level of seniority. If you are at a higher level, you can be paid more than 100 RMB a month, but no more than 200 RMB, and if your at a lower level, 70-80 RMB for a month. In terms of how many classes they need to teach in a month, it is at least 4-8, as well as routine work. So it is all about teachers' dedication and their love for the students. (Sun, Dongfang Primary School, a vice-principal)

High investment but low reward was reflected by the teachers' workload with students with SEN being underestimated.

4.3 How Inspectors Perceive the Implementation of LRC

An evaluation of special education led by the Jiangzhou Education Bureau was carried out prior to the study. This sought to examine the practice of LRC and the development of special education throughout Jiangzhou following the announcement of the *Second Phase Plan of Special Education 2017-2020 of Jiangzhou*.

4.3.1 Quality of provision

4.3.1.1 The importance of local plans

In Jiangzhou, every primary school, junior middle school and kindergarten is managed by the educational departments at the district level. To promote the development of special education and LRC, each district was obliged to formulate a local second phase special education plan for 2017-2020 (three-year plan). Chai, a policy maker and the vice-principal of a special education school, explained that since the municipal plan involved ten districts and each one had their own unique conditions, a tailored plan was to be made by each district in light of the municipal plan and the conditions of each district. This would allow more practical targets and the process of implementing the LRC policy to be more operable. The municipal documents guided the local ones, with the documents at the district level acting as instructions for action for schools. Therefore, without the documents at the district level, the process of promoting LRC may be slowed down or even become confused. Chai provided two examples, one with a local plan and another without.

> ...At that time, Daoxian District was the only one that had not announced its local plan, which caused a series of problems... such as subsidies. There was no clear boundary between resource and regular education teachers, with some schools not having professional resource teachers and

> most resource teachers being part-time. Usually they are course or class teachers and since those teachers do not obtain any subsidy for working with students with SEN, working as a resource teacher required dedication, yet this cannot last for a long time. (Chai, an inspector, group 4)

> Jiaoxian District announced its local three-year-plan, with many of the provisions put into practice. For example, there were clear explanations about the responsibilities of resource teachers and their compensation. During interviews with school leaders, it became clear that this compensation was being paid to resource teachers. (Chai, an inspector group 4)

Moreover, just like the documents at the national and municipal levels, the local three-year plans were drafted by educational departments, with eight government departments involved, namely the Disabled Persons Federation, the Civil Affairs Bureau, the Finance Bureau, the Health Bureau, the Development and Reform Commission, the Education Bureau, the Human Resources and Social Security Bureau, and the Commission Office for Public Sector Reform. These departments worked together to accelerate the development of special education and LRC. Chai stated that:

> when we visited the schools in District Haixian, leaders and representatives of these eight departments accompanied when we carried out the evaluation. The attendance of the leaders and representatives of these departments indicates that the government of Haixian District pays close attention to the evaluation, thereby increasing the pressure to improve the implementation of LRC. (Chai, an inspector, group 4)

4.3.1.2 Issues related to assessments

As stated, children of regular schools who wish to be identified as having Special Education Needs (SEN) are required to undergo a series of procedures, including a health assessment, filling out application forms and getting approval. Typically, only

those who are identified as students with SEN are able to enjoy the 'special treatment' in resource rooms, but when it was put into practice it caused some issues. Firstly, parents do not want their children to be labelled, which has been discussed (Chapter 4, section 4.2.3). Affected by parents' negative attitudes, some schools claimed that they did not have any students with SEN, which was confirmed by both Jun and Fang who expressed their anxiety that without these students, resource rooms would only be used for 'decoration'.

> I know that some students may have problems related to their studies, behaviour or emotions, but they are not identified as children with SEN as they do not have disability certificates. Some school leaders believe that some parents usually think that once their children receive the disability certificate, they will be labelled, therefore they refuse to get one. (Jun, an inspector, group 1)

> Some parents are unwilling to admit the reality that there are some problems with their children and they refuse any assessments for them. The children who have not had any assessments cannot be identified as students with SEN, thus they are not able to receive the educational service of the resource rooms... some schools have resource rooms, but they claim not to have students with special education needs. Ultimately, these rooms are merely used for decoration. (Fang, an inspector, group 1)

Another issue is the confusion regarding the results of being identified, with both Yan and Ming mentioning that one may appear more severe than someone else in terms of the degree of disability, but the grades applied to their disability certificates may indicate the opposite. Therefore, Yan called for a group of experts to carry out an assessment, proposing that many members are involved, including doctors, teachers, staff from the Disabled Persons' Federation and Civil Affairs Bureau, and parents. This type of expert group had previously been formed in Jiangzhou, and their purpose was to offer assessments and suggestions for children with disabilities prior to them going to school or kindergarten, yet it was limited only to those who applied for special education schools.

4.3.2 Quality of teaching

Regarding the quality of teaching, the conditions vary depending on the school. During the interviews, both Jun and Fang regarded Dongfang Primary School highly in terms of equipment, personnel and teaching. Fang stated that although some schools had been equipped with resource rooms, the resource teachers of those schools were not as professional as those in Dongfang Primary School. Jun also stated that:

> When visiting the resource rooms, two students were having sensory integration training who have mild mental retardation and receive training there. Therefore, after witnessing that, we felt that they had put LRC into practice. (Jun, an inspector, Group 1)

Concerning other schools, the inspectors did not regard them as highly, but their offering of academic support and heart-to-heart conversations was reported by many of them. Some resource teachers informed the inspectors that they did not know how to use the resource room or how to conduct individualised training based on the unique needs of each student, but they did know how to help students with their studies. Moreover, Ming also provided examples indicating that the training may not suit the needs of the students.

> ...A student with physical disabilities should have had rehabilitation training, but he actually went to resource rooms for extra academic lessons... Similarly, a boy with some hearing problems did not take speech training. (Ming, an inspector, Group 3)

Both the positive and negative examples listed above indicate that the quality of teaching is closely related to resource teachers as those with professional knowledge and skills are able to offer appropriate training for students, whereas those with little knowledge may find it difficult to offer individualised instruction based on their individual needs. However, they can offer academic help or have deep and

meaningful conversations, which may influence the effectiveness of LRC.

4.3.3 Policy rhetoric

In terms of the evaluation, inspectors typically spent half a day listening to the report and another half a day visiting some schools selected by the local education bureau. Some interviewers reported that what they had heard beforehand usually contradicted what they later saw, or vice versa.

4.3.3.1 Good reports, embarrassing conditions

Jun from group 1 stated that she was aware that Daoxian District had not performed well in terms of the practice of LRC. After listening to the report provided by the education bureau, she changed her mind and concluded that the practice of LRC in Daoxian District was better than she had believed due to the content of the report. However, when she visited schools she changed her mind again:

> During the school visits, we found that they did not use the resource room even though it had already been set up, while neither the area of the resource room nor the equipment met the applicable standards. I believe it is acceptable that the area or the equipment does not meet the standards immediately, but the rooms which are already equipped should be used for students. However, what I saw was new equipment with brand marks on it and some with its packaging still intact, hence all of it had simply been prepared for the evaluation. Then, we looked up the records related to LRC and what we found there led us to become suspicious that fraud was being committed. (Jun, an inspector, group 1)

4.3.3.2 No students with special needs?

Typically, the schools selected to be observed were listed on a piece of paper issued by the local Education Bureau, with inspectors able to choose two to three from the list. One inspector group deliberately chose one school not listed on the paper and

when they visited it, they discovered that the resource room was used for other purposes and the explanation was that they did not have any students with disabilities or special education needs.

> A resource room in one Primary School was not fit to be called a resource room. It is a multi-function room that is sometimes used to carry out activities related to science and technology, while it is sometimes used for psychological guidance or as a teachers' office. The school's explanation for this is that they have no students with SEN. Perhaps it is true that there are no students with SEN in the school but maybe they do not pay enough attention to some 'special students'. (Jun, an inspector, group 1)

Fang, in the same group as Jun, stated that it was incorrect for them to claim that they did not have any students with special education needs.

> When we looked up the data and information concerning LRC, we found records of students with special education needs. The school's leader explained that because the parents of those children had refused to take disability certificates, they could not be identified as students with SEN. (Fang, an inspector, group 1)

Fang concluded that these children were likely not to be learning in regular classes but instead just sitting in them.

4.3.3.3 Resource rooms put into practice?

According to the interviewers, resource rooms are one of the key points of this evaluation. As well as the hardware of resource rooms, which included its space and equipment, they also paid attention to how often they were used and what students did in them. After visiting resource rooms, some inspectors began to doubt whether they were being put into practice.

> In a junior middle school, I can find detailed information about instruction

> records, instruction plans, instruction timetables and teachers' tasks. In contrast, what we found in a primary school was only simple records of the date and the words 'being used'...I suspect that the primary school may not use the resource room. (Ming, an inspector, group 3)

Chai also pointed out a similar problem and despite not pointing it out as directly as Ming did, he commented that the records in relation to resource rooms were not as 'detailed' as in some schools.

> According to the records, we could see that some schools arrange individualised instructions once or twice a week or more, but as for what they actually do, we could not find any detailed information. Instead we only saw the headline 'individualised instruction' without any additional details. (Chai, an inspector, group 4)

The information above illustrates that in some schools, LRC has not been put into practice for various reasons, with some minor problems used as excuses for schools to slow down the practice of LRC.

4.4 Summary

In this chapter, the data collected from interviews, observations and documentation reviews will be compared and analysed. In Jiangzhou, students wishing to enjoy educational services in resource rooms must go through a series of procedures, including medical assessments, completing application forms and onsite assessments, and ultimately they will be identified as students with special education needs. At the school level, teachers and classmates offering additional support were two measures used to implement LRC. Teachers' perceptions towards their roles varied based on their different positions, with class and part-time resource teachers believing that providing academic support and managing classes are their key responsibilities. Nevertheless, full-time resource teachers believed that offering individualised instruction to students with special education needs was their role, while administrators and vice-principals played different roles in LRC work.

Regarding the perceptions and attitudes towards students with SEN, class teachers were reluctant to accept them and exhibited negative or neutral attitudes, whereas resource teachers and vice-principals (administrators) tended to show positive attitudes and sympathy due to the isolated condition of these students in regular classrooms and their challenging family conditions. Although no parent was involved in the study, the interviews with teachers indicated that parents of students without disabilities usually showed positive attitudes towards students with SEN provided that their children were not disturbed. Moreover, parents of students with SEN may be suspicious of, or develop negative attitudes towards, LRC, which has been a barrier to its practice.

Even though a three-level training system was created, the opportunities for teachers remained limited, therefore some schools carried out training or spent money on training which was organised by non-official institutions as a supplement. Moreover, the characteristics of the training were that it was only for a short-time period and it was more focused on theories, which made teachers feel that it was impractical, hence they called for education-focused training that is systemic, practical and more inclusive.

As for the perceptions of LRC, an agreement has been reached that LRC is beneficial for students since many positive results in terms of life adaption, self-confidence and communication skills have been reported by teachers. Even though class teachers have felt pressure to practice LRC due to students' behavioural problems and low academic achievement, it has also had a positive influence on teachers. Specifically, teachers who have been involved in LRC have tended to become more tolerant both to students with special education needs and those with low academic achievement.

Many factors may influence the effectiveness of LRC and quality of provisions is one of them, which refers to the local plans for the practice of LRC. Whether the local plan was published and whether those administrative departments involved in it paid sufficient attention to LRC were closely related to the success of it. Teaching quality is another reason, yet from the interviews with inspectors, some schools

offered inappropriate training for the teachers due to a lack of professional knowledge of teaching. Moreover, there were doubts raised as to whether some schools which had received good reports but had bad conditions had put LRC into practice.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

This chapter is divided into three sections, with the first comprising the discussion, where the results will be presented under the conceptual framework of the 'index for inclusion', namely 'inclusive culture', 'inclusive policy' and 'inclusive practice' (Booth & Ainscow, 2002, p8). Related to each dimension, several sub-themes will be discussed, as well as the social and cultural context of China and a comparison with related literature. In the second section, practical implications will be described and the final section is the conclusion, with the findings outlined with the purpose of answering the research questions.

5.1 Discussion of the Findings

In this section, the 'index for inclusion' will be applied to review the issues that arose as LRC was being implemented in Jiangzhou and comprehend how LRC is understood and implemented at the school and district levels. As mentioned, there are three dimensions to the 'index for inclusion', and beneath each of them there are two sections (see Figure 5.1), which the study data will be compared and contrasted with.

Figure 5.1: The dimensions and sections in the index (Booth & Ainscow, 2002, p.8)

Dimension A Creating inclusive culture	Section A1: Establishing inclusive values
	Section A2: Building community
Dimension B Producing inclusive policies	Section B1: Developing the school for all
	Section B2: Organising support for diversity
Dimension C Evolving inclusive practices	Section C1: Orchestrating learning
	Section C2: Mobilising resources

5.1.1 Inclusive Culture

According to the 'index for inclusion', inclusive culture consists of two key aspects: 'establishing inclusive values' and 'building community' (Booth & Ainscow, 2002, p.8). In this dimension, the intention is for every stakeholder, including teachers, parents, governors and students, to have shared inclusive values and foster a secure, accepting, collaborative and stimulating community to ensure that the school is more inclusive (Booth & Ainscow, 2002). Therefore, stakeholders' perceptions towards LRC and students with special education needs, as well as whether a community has been established, will be discussed.

5.1.1.1 Establishing inclusive values

This study indicated that all the teachers held positive attitudes towards LRC and expressed that it was beneficial for students with special education needs, yet this did not lead to them being willing to accept students with SEN. Compared with vice-principals (administrators) and resource teachers, class teachers exhibited the least willingness to allow students with special education needs to study in their classes, thereby contradicting the purpose of the 'inclusive culture' dimension, whereby an 'accepting' community is to be established at schools. However, this finding accords with those of other researchers' (e.g. Deng, 2008; Lee & Lee, 2008), namely that regular education teachers showing positive attitudes to students with SEN being in their class does not necessarily mean that they are willing to accept and take responsibility for instructing them.

Examination oriented schooling may be the primary reason for class teachers' reluctance to accept students with Special Education Needs(SEN). During the interviews, all the class teachers described their anxiety caused by the low academic achievement of the students, particularly Chun whose class was soon due to attend its primary school graduation examination. Despite the Chinese government's persistance in promoting quality-oriented schooling to satisfy the need for high quality education, the examination-oriented system continues to dominate (Deng &

Pei, 2009; Xu, Cooper & Sin, 2017). Achieving high scores is the only means of gaining access to higher institutions, which leads to front-line teachers focusing more on students' academic performance rather than their overall development. Therefore, when teachers found that students with SEN were unable to keep up with others academically even when they had spent a lot of time and energy helping them, they felt anxious and unwilling to accept them.

Insufficient professional knowledge may be another reason, which has been confirmed by other studies' (e.g. Cook, et al., 2007; Peng, 2003; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996) findings that regular education teachers lacked confidence or were reluctant to accept students with SEN due to a lack of professional knowledge, a lack of professional special education teachers and severely problematic behaviours. From the interviews, it was evident that compared with resource teachers, class teachers were not as confident in either their abilities to teach students with SEN or dealing with their emotional or behavioural problems. Moreover, they had limited training opportunities related to inclusive education and although class teachers spent more time with students with SEN compared to resource teachers, some were also obligated to take on the regular responsibilities of resource teachers, such as offering individualised lessons, while the training opportunities were usually afforded to resource teachers. On the other hand, some training sessions that they had attended were irrelevant or impractical, with most official training held by the local special education guidance centre in which staff tend to be from special education schools. Prior to 2014 there was not much interaction between mainstream and special education schools, which caused staff from the local special education guidance centre to be unclear about the requirements in inclusive settings, while knowing more about lessons for children with disabilities in special education schools. However, students with SEN studying in mainstream schools may be more complicated given that many types of disability are included and some may not have been identified in special education schools, such as learning disabilities and ADHD. Therefore, from the interviews, some training was reported as lacking in practical elements and being more related to special education.

According to the description of the 'inclusive values' dimension, vice principals

(administrators) and resource teachers are also stakeholders in the practice of LRC, with both holding positive attitudes towards students with special education needs, expressing their willingness to support them However, underlying this 'positive attitude' is a feeling of sympathy and charity rather than the ideology of 'inclusive values', and the reasons for this vary from person to person. Regarding principals (administrators), when interviewed they usually pinpointed the achievements made, the support offered and the equipment provided, while only one administrator described her experience of interacting with students with special education needs. They may understand how LRC is implemented at the school level but they were rarely involved in it, and their positive attitudes were to some extent derived from the benefits that it brought to schools, such as enhancing its reputation. As for resource teachers, compared with class teachers or administrators, they had greater opportunities for interacting with students with special education needs, as well as more professional knowledge of special education, making them feel more responsible for helping students with SEN. Part-time resource teachers believed that their main responsibilities were to provide academic support and manage a class, yet even though they held positive attitudes toward students with SEN they were unable to fulfill their roles as resource teachers.

5.1.1.2 Building a community

As well as shared inclusive values, building a community, which involves regular education teachers, special education teachers, parents and other stakeholders is deemed crucial to an inclusive school (Booth & Ainscow, 2002). Nevertheless, the findings indicated that only class teachers, resource teachers and vice-principals (administrators) responsible for the work of LRC were a part of the 'community', with principals and parents excluded, which is inconsistent with the concept of 'a community' outlined in the 'index for inclusion' (Booth & Ainscow, 2002, p.8).

When the author contacted principals at the very beginning of the study, all of them refused the author's request to be interviewed about LRC, providing a similar reason, namely they were 'unclear about what it is'. This is despite all three sample schools making achievements concerning LRC, such as Haihong Primary School taking the

initiative to carry out several training sessions in relation to it, thus improving teachers' professional knowledge. In Dongfang Primary School, they transformed nine rooms in one floor to resource rooms, and all are well-equipped. Zipi Primary School classified LRC as one of the school's brands and gained a positive reputation among the public. None of these accomplishments could be achieved without the support of the principals, hence they are more akin to supporters instead of being involved in the community.

Regarding parents of students with SEN, the findings indicated that they, as stakeholders, were not involved in the practice of LRC, and they initially held suspicious or negative attitudes towards it, which is inconsistent with previous studies which found that parents are the 'strongest advocates' of LRC (Su, Guo & Wang, 2020). A possible reason for this disparity is the differences between the types of disabilities children may have. In Su, Guo and Wang's (2020) study, the targets were children with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Their parents understood what this disorder was and exhibited a a positive attitude towards contributing to a more inclusive setting because they believed that it would be beneficial for their children. However, most students in this study were deemed to have learning disabilities or mild mental retardation, hence the parents may have thought that their children were simply inefficient at learning, but they did not have any disabilities. Therefore, when discussing their children's problems, parents held suspicious or even negative attitudes and their focus was typically on the consequences of 'being labeled', which may cause their children to face discrimination and 'feel shamed' or 'lose face', increasing their reluctance to be involved. Another factor is that some parents believed that the responsibilities of teachers is simply to teach, while it is the responsibility of a parent to raise their children. Previous unsatisfactory results may also have influenced parents' attitudes.

Concerning parents of students without disability, most showed a welcoming, tolerant and caring attitude towards students with special education needs provided that their children were not negatively affected, which is congruent to other studies (e.g. Jia & Santi, 2020). Once their children's performance or achievements were detrimentally impacted, parents of students without disability exhibited an entirely

different attitude or put pressure on class teachers to protect the interests of their own children.

Even though some schools claimed that a community concerning LRC had been established, such as ‘resource teachers groups’ in Zipi Primary School, the work of LRC is confined to specific teachers. In terms of fostering an inclusive community involving staff, students, governors and parents, as stated in the ‘inclusive culture’ dimension, there is a significant amount of work required.

5.1.2 Inclusive Policies

Beneath the dimension of inclusive policies, there are two indicators: ‘developing the school for all’ and ‘organising support for diversity’ (Booth & Ainscow, 2002). It is widely recognised that the practice of LRC is driven by a series of policies (Chen, 1996; Ellsworth & Zhang, 2007), and whether the design of these policies is based on inclusive values may greatly affect the results of LRC. In this section, policies concerning school admission, support and workload identification will be discussed and evaluated using the two indicators listed above.

5.1.2.1 Developing school for all

The special education system and the regular education system run in parallel in China (Deng and Zhu, 2016), allowing parents to decide whether their children go to a special education or regular education school. Under the *Compulsory Education Act* (2008), every child is entitled to go to their local schools and under no circumstances can schools reject students, thus once parents choose for their child to go to a mainstream school nearby, the school must accept. From the interviews, many teachers reported that they did not know that anything was amiss with the students in the beginning, and even when discovering that some seemed to be different from others, they were not allowed to reject them, demonstrating that ‘the school is open to all’ in terms of admission procedures.

‘High investment but low reward’ is the work condition of resource teachers

discussed not only by resource teachers but by vice-principals (administrators). The regular workload of teachers did not tend to be diminished when they took on the extra responsibilities as resource teachers, while the compensation for the resource teacher work is low, reflecting the reality that teachers' workload with students with special education needs was not recognised and was underestimated. In contrast, both resource teachers and class teachers must sacrifice their break time to provide educational services to students with special education needs, which is inconsistent with how the dimension of inclusive policies is described, namely 'policies to encourage the participation of staff' (p8). 'High investment but low reward' is likely to dissuade teachers from the practice of LRC, with another study conducted in other provinces in China also establishing that teachers' additional workload with students with SEN was not paid or even acknowledged by school leaders (Jia & Santi, 2020). Hence, it may be commonplace that teachers' workload with students with SEN has not been recognised or has been underestimated in Chinese inclusive settings.

A possible reason is that the principals or governors believed that the practice of LRC was more down to charity and dedication rather than formal accountabilities. Influenced by these beliefs, teachers' work with students with SEN was viewed as an indication of their love and dedication rather than professional knowledge and responsibilities. Nonetheless, if the efforts of teachers involved in LRC are described using words such as 'dedication' and 'voluntary' rather than 'professional' or 'responsibility', it is unlikely that high standards will be set for the work of LRC, which may influence the outcomes of its practice.

Another reason is the lack of criteria in relation to workload identification and performance evaluation. The workload and evaluation of lessons in regular classrooms are easily identifiable because these lessons have been added to the class schedules at fixed times and places, and the teaching quality is evaluated and ranked through students' academic performance. In contrast, the time and location for lessons for students with SEN was usually unfixed. Although all three schools implemented regulations in terms of the duration and frequency of individualised instructions, evaluation criteria for the results were not. Thus, schools were able to guarantee that all students with SEN were offered individualised instruction but

there were no criteria as to whether the instruction was effective or not. Due to the lack of criteria for performance evaluation, teachers' compensation for their additional workload with students with SEN was based on the title they had been given based on their ability to teach academics rather than their performance in working with students with SEN.

5.1.2.2 Ensuring support for diversity

The support for students with special education needs slightly differ depending on the school, with one recognising that educational services from course and resource teachers should be provided for students with special education needs. Course teachers are primarily responsible for academic studies, and Chinese and mathematics teachers usually offered additional lessons based on students' cognitive levels. Resource teachers are responsible for rehabilitation lessons, such as sensory integration, fine movement and hand-eye coordination based on students' unique needs.

Moreover, two of the schools applied 'mutual assistance groups' or 'little assistants', whereby classmates, particularly elite ones, were responsible for supporting students with special education needs. They typically sat next to students with SEN to help them with both their studies and daily lives and it is clear that this support has been offered to ensure student diversity, thereby satisfying the section of 'organising support for diversity'.

However, the author is concerned about the support provided by students, specifically the elite students. Although peer tutoring is deemed to be helpful for students' studies and social behaviours, it is also seen as reciprocal as it leads to students without disability becoming more tolerant towards students with SEN (e.g. He & Zuo, 2012; Meijer, 2001; Mortweet, et al.1999). In the Chinese primary school setting, it is common to find 'mutual assistance groups' or 'little assistants' since it is widely applied not only for students with SEN but for those with low academic achievement. Usually, students with high academic levels tended to be positioned near those with poor academic levels to form 'mutual assistance groups', with the

assumption that the elite students will help the lower achieving ones with their studies and behaviour, resulting in both the academic performance and discipline of the entire class improving. However, the question of whether intentionally placing elite students next to students with SEN reinforces the label that 'they are disadvantaged' may require further research.

Moreover, many studies have reported that children with disabilities or special education needs receive lower peer acceptance and are generally ignored and rejected by peers (e.g. Boer & Piji, 2016; Xu & Zhao, 2017; Zhang, Lian & He, 2019). Elite students were typically appointed by teachers as a member of a 'mutual assistance group' and took responsibility for helping students with special education needs, hence they are deemed to be important members of the LRC community. Only through shared inclusive values can a 'mutual assistance group' be mutually beneficial to both elite students and those with special education needs. Otherwise, it may cause harm to both parties, with students with special education needs potentially being viewed as troublesome, with discrimination inevitably emanating from the rest of the group, which contradicts the notion of LRC.

5.1.3 Inclusive Practices

Regarding the dimension of inclusive practices, orchestrating learning and mobilising resources are given as two sections, while the 'index of inclusion' indicates that both inclusive values and policies can be reflected through school practices (Booth & Ainscow, 2002). In this dimension, school practices concerning how students with SEN were taught and the type of resources used to support it will be reviewed.

5.1.3.1 Orchestrating learning

As the author was not allowed to observe the actual classes, the data in terms of curriculum and teaching strategies modification was obtained from the interviews with teachers. During the interviews, teachers described their experience of offering individualised instructions with students with SEN, with these lessons they described

being conducted in resource rooms or teachers' offices. However, in terms of regular education classrooms, no one explained the steps that had been taken to meet students' diverse needs. Only Yiwei from Zipi Primary School stated that teachers lowered the difficulties of exercises or exempted students from particular exercises if the learning difficulties of the students with SEN meant that the exercises far exceeded their cognitive levels. According to the description of the inclusive practices dimension, 'lessons are made responsive to student diversity' (Booth & Ainscow, 2002, p.8), whereas from the data collected by the author, limited curriculum adaptation and teaching strategies modification were found in these schools. Nonetheless, it is in accordance with other studies which found that teachers were inclined to help students out of care and love, and the strategy they preferred to apply was difficulties reduction (e.g. Wei, Liao & Chen, 2018) due to it being the most convenient and time-saving approach.

One possible reason for this is that teachers believed that students with SEN could not be educated in regular classrooms and that their responsibility is to provide academic support to the majority of students due to large class sizes of around 50 students. Teachers usually prepared for lessons in line with the majority of students' academic levels rather than the requirement to ensure student diversity. Moreover, the unwritten rule regarding the exemption of the academic achievements of students with SEN reinforced teachers' beliefs, which was confirmed by some teachers who advised that the grades of students with SEN were not counted among overall class scores. This unwritten rule influenced teachers' inclination to modify curricula or teaching strategies to satisfy the diverse requirements of students with SEN. Furthermore, another reason is that many teachers lack knowledge and skills in curriculum and teaching strategies modification for students with SEN.

5.1.3.2 Mobilising resources

According to the description of the 'mobilising resources' section, as well as teachers, other stakeholders of a community, such as students, parents and local communities are expected to support learning and participation (Booth & Ainscow, 2002, p.8). Both students and parents have been discussed, with the former playing a

vital role in supporting peers with SEN in studies and participating in school activities, whereas the support from parents was limited due to their belief that they are accountable for raising children but not educating them.

Regarding local communities, the local special education guidance centre was seen as a management and guidance department for the practice of LRC, which was mentioned by many teachers. From the interviews, all three schools were reported to obtain external resource from the guidance centre yet their interaction with the guidance centre differed somewhat. Since the local guidance centre is located in Dongfang Primary School, the school's students could enjoy the well-equipped resource rooms of the guidance centre as well as its professional educational services. As for the other two schools, their interaction with the local guidance centre is confined to teachers' training and assessment for students, and although the three schools reported varying degrees of involvement from the local guidance centre, it is clear that the local special education guidance centres played their roles in supporting the practice of LRC at the school level.

Therefore, regarding 'mobilising resources', students, teachers and the local special education guidance centre were involved in providing support for the learning and participation of students with SEN, whereas parents seemingly had limited involvement.

5.2 Implications for practice

Since the introduction of inclusive education into China, the search for better measures to promote the practice of LRC has never ceased, with some scholars proposing many measures based on a comparison with inclusive education in western nations. However, the author wishes to point out that it is impossible to borrow some measures from western nations directly, while there are some that we cannot put into practice within a short period of time, such as reducing class sizes or changing teachers' or parents' attitudes due to China's unique social and cultural context. Moreover, there are some measures that could be implemented which may bring positive change to inclusive settings, as will be discussed below.

5.2.1 Optimise the training system for mainstream school teachers

Training is crucial for the development of LRC, and from this study the author has learned that the local education bureau is vital in terms of training. The training of special education were conducted since 2012, but many regular teachers continued to claim that they knew little or nothing about LRC, including a class teacher with a student with special education needs in her class. Moreover, both resource teachers and administrators stated that some of the training was not appropriate to them, demonstrating that not all of the training concerning special education is suitable for teachers in an inclusive setting. Although derived from special education, the inclusive education today differs from it, therefore more inclusive setting focused training is necessary both during the pre-service sand in-service periods. A series of inclusive education curricula should be designed, including fundamental knowledge of inclusive education, skills related to offering individualised instruction, skills related to modifying curricula and teaching strategies based on students' unique needs, skills related to collaborating with other teachers and skills related to creating an inclusive atmosphere.

5.2.2 Set the criteria for workload identification and performance evaluation

Payment as a stimuli may to some extent promote teachers' enthusiasm to increase their involvement with LRC. According to the *2014-2016 Promotion Plan of Special Education of Jiangzhou*, resource teachers are entitled to another 15% allowances to encourage their work with students with special education needs, yet in reality there is only a small payment of around 80 to 100 RMB every month, which is lower than the required rate, thus both administrative departments and schools should rethink the allocation of this payment. Prior to increasing the payment, standards of workload identification and performance evaluation should be set as the guide for teachers and the allocation of payment, while the payment could be divided into two parts: one for workload and the other for performance evaluation. Teachers who take more responsibility for the work of LRC or make greater achievements in terms of the practice of LRC are to be rewarded financially.

Despite the financial incentives, more attention must also be paid to the workload of part-time resource teachers. Among 374 resource teachers in Jiangzhou, only three are full-time, with the rest being part-time, and as part time resource teachers, they may carry out multiple roles, such as class teachers, course teachers and resource teachers, and each role demands significant time and energy. Therefore, their workload cannot be calculated through simply adding extra responsibilities, hence schools should reconsider the workload for part-time resource teachers.

5.2.3 The further spread of the idea of inclusive education and the policy of LRC

Although some administrators and class teachers stated that they were committed to fostering an inclusive atmosphere among the class and the school, it was evident from the interviews that the notion of inclusive education was not widely accepted. Teachers and administrators deemed the work with students with SEN to be charity rather than individual rights, hence the idea of inclusive education must be further disseminated at the school and district levels. For instance, administrative departments could distribute relevant media and material, as well as hold activities, to disseminate the idea of inclusive education and the policy of LRC.

Regarding schools, ‘parent schools’ may be an effective means of spreading the idea of inclusive education and LRC policy. Knowledge of inclusive education and the policy of LRC could be imparted to all the parents by such schools, while it should be understood that inclusive education is not an idea that only benefits children with SEN, but a broad concept seeking to improve education for all (Armstrong, 2008; Florian & Linklater, 2010; Qu, 2019). Furthermore, more face-to-face communication could be carried out between teachers and parents of students with special education needs, enabling parents to gain a deep understanding of LRC policy and the teachers’ efforts in relation to it. Moreover, slogans concerning inclusive education could be used for decoration both at schools and in the classrooms given that no slogans or posters concerning inclusive education were visible when visiting the three target schools.

5.3 Summary

In this study, the author intentionally selected three sample schools to investigate the condition of the practice of LRC in the central area of Jiangzhou, and the entire study is guided by the following research questions:

> How is LRC understood and implemented at the school and district levels?
> What are the perspectives and experiences of teachers of LRC?

To address these questions, answers were obtained by making a comparison between the data collected and the 'index for inclusive' proposed by Booth and Ainscow (2002) within three dimensions. As for the culture of the schools, teachers agreed that LRC policy was beneficial for students with special education needs, while in terms of attitudes, vice-principals (administrators) and resource teachers tended to hold positive attitude towards students with special education needs, whereas class teachers exhibited negative attitudes. Moreover, a community of inclusive education had not been nurtured due to the absence of principals and parents, and regarding school policies and practice, the positive aspect is that the 'no rejection policy' was put into practice, meaning that all children who lived nearby the three schools were enrolled by them. Support from teachers, students and the local special education guidance centre was mobilised to promote the learning and participation of students with SEN, yet underestimated workload identification, low compensation for working with students with SEN and limited curricula and teaching strategy modification have been significant barriers and influenced the quality of LRC, which may further hinder its development (See Table 5.3).

Table 5.3 The summary of findings

Dimension A Creating inclusive culture	Teachers agreed that LRC policy was beneficial for students with special education needs, while in terms of attitudes, only vice-principals (administrators) and resource teachers tended to hold positive attitude

	towards students with special education needs.
	A community of inclusive education had not been nurtured.
Dimension B Producing inclusive policies	'No rejection policy' was put into practice.
	The workload of resource teachers was underestimated.
Dimension C Evolving inclusive practices	Support from teachers, students and the local special education guidance centre was mobilised to promote the learning and participation of students with SEN.
	Limited curricula and teaching strategy modification have been significant barriers and influenced the quality of LRC.

When it comes to the first research question regarding how LRC is practiced at the school level, primary schools viewed each student equally in terms of school admission. Support for students with SEN was offered based on the unique needs of each student and it could be divided into three key parts, namely support from: course teachers, resource teachers and students. Firstly, course teachers are responsible for offering academic support based on the cognitive levels of students, such as Chinese teachers teaching the Chinese phonetic alphabet if the student is unclear about it. Secondly, resource teachers are responsible for rehabilitation lessons based on students' needs, such as sensory integration therapy being offered to those with coordination problems, and communication skills being taught to those with difficulties communicating. Moreover, 'little assistants', which are selected from among the students were to sit next to students with special education needs and were primarily responsible for helping with daily activities and their studies. Moreover, all three schools also received support from the local special education guidance centre for their teachers as well as students with special education needs. Nevertheless, limited parental involvement, as well as limited curricula and teaching strategy modification, have impacted the effectiveness of LRC.

Regarding LRC at the district level, it was largely practised by the local special

education guidance centre, which was responsible for offering assessments, organising teacher training and providing support when necessary. Moreover, the local LRC documents, such as the 2014-2016 promotion plan of special education at the district level, led the development of LRC both at the district and school levels.

In terms of the second research question, LRC has a different meaning for different teachers depending on the positions they hold. For vice-principals (administrator), LRC is a part of the school's achievement and they usually supported the practice of LRC yet were not heavily involved in it. Concerning class teachers, they tend to carry out different roles in the practice of LRC, and when they are taking on the responsibility of course teachers, LRC entails students with special education needs being physically placed in the classroom because they believe that students cannot be educated in regular classrooms. They prepared lessons based on the level of the majority of students, rarely giving consideration to the needs of students with special education needs. Even in individualised classes, they still found that it was very challenging for students with SEN to make academic progress, and when they were carrying out their responsibilities as class teachers, they believed that their primary responsibilities were to ensure the students' safety, maintain the discipline of the class, nurture good relationships with parents and foster an inclusive atmosphere. As for resource teachers, they were clear as to what LRC is and what it signifies for students with special education needs, while they felt that it was necessary to offer additional individualised instruction to students with special education needs and were willing to devote energy and time to offer support for the students, yet they only focused on individualised instruction in resource rooms. As for students with special education needs being unable to perform well academically in regular classes, while feeling sympathy for those students, they did not provide any targeted support.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

6.1 Introduction

The initial purpose of this study was to uncover the issues that existed in the practice of LRC in order to better implement it. When reading the literature, it was found that almost every study concerning LRC was conducted through quantitative approaches, such as surveys. However, the author believed that the issues related to the practice of LRC could not be thoroughly understood through binary responses, therefore a case study was applied as the methodology of the study.

Seven teachers from the school the author works at were selected as inspectors to evaluate the development of special education and the practice of LRC across the entire city. Through the conversations with the inspectors, some basic information concerning LRC was obtained, while three schools were chosen as the targets. At the time, the author was a front-line special education teacher and did not interact frequently with mainstream schools. Prior to contacting the principals of these three target schools, a great deal of preparation was carried out as it was evident that without the approval of these 'gate-keepers', the study was unable to be conducted. Gladly, all of the principals confirmed my requests and recommended that their vice-principals or administrators participate in the interviews, yet only interviews with teachers were allowed. Therefore, the research plan was modified and interviews were held with class teachers, resource teachers and vice-principals (administrators) respectively in the three schools. Moreover, a school visit took place to the target schools and finally eight teachers were interviewed from regular schools and five inspectors from the school that the author works at.

The author collected the data from interviews with participants, published and unpublished documents and materials collected during the school visits, and all of this data was compared and analysed. Finally, several sub-themes were produced,

namely ‘how three schools practise LRC’, ‘how the teachers perceive their roles’, ‘teachers’ attitudes and perceptions of students with special education needs’, ‘how the teachers perceive the parents’, ‘professional development related to special education needs’ and ‘teachers’ perceptions of the policy’. Subsequently, this data was reviewed using the conceptual framework of ‘the index for inclusion’, which indicates that every teacher believes that LRC is beneficial for students with SEN, yet this does not signify that they are willing to accept these students. Teachers’ attitudes towards students with SEN varies depending on the position that they hold, with class teachers tending to show negative attitudes while administrators and resource teachers show positive ones. An inclusive community has not been established at the schools, while insufficient practical training, a lack of parental support, unclear workload identification standards and limited curricula adaption and strategies modification have been barriers for the practice of LRC.

6.2 The Originality of the Study

Originality is mainly concerned with producing something unknown or testing something in an unknown context. In this study, the originality relates to the following three aspects.

Firstly, even though it has spent a lot of energy and funds to promote LRC, no studies had been carried out in the context of Jiangzhou, a tier two city, hence the author addressed this gap and presented a detailed picture of what LRC implementing in the context of Jiangzhou.

Secondly, the conceptual framework used has been adopted to review schools in more than thirty nations but never put into practice in the context of China, thus this study could contribute to the knowledge related to the adoption of the ‘index for inclusion’ in international literature.

Thirdly, a qualitative approach was applied that only a small number of researchers have chosen to adopt when researching LRC, and a qualitative study is useful when it comes to answering open-ended questions and helping the readers and researchers

to gain a better understanding of the phenomena, uncovering the reasons behind it. In this study, how LRC is implemented at the school and district levels is presented, as well as the reasons that may impede the practice of LRC are outlined.

6.3 Limitations of the Study

The author faced many limitations when conducting the study, and significant effort was made to minimise these limitations that may influence the results of this study. Admittedly, some are beyond the author's control and it is inevitable that every study has its own limitations.

The most significant limitation in this study is the small sample size. Three sample schools were intentionally selected in order to obtain rich data, but only eight teachers from three schools were interviewed following the recommendation of the 'gatekeepers' of each school. Moreover, the sensitivity of inclusive education was far beyond my expectations, with these 'gatekeepers' only willing to allow me to interview a small number of teachers and refusing my request to interview students with disabilities and their parents to protect students' privacy. Therefore, five inspectors were added as participants of the study as they had recently completed special education inspections of the three districts that the three sample schools are located in, which entailed them visiting the schools, checking reports, observing classes and interviewing the principals. From the interviews with these inspectors, more data concerning LRC both at the school and district levels was gathered, while another important reason is that the five inspectors are all from the school that the author works at, rendering it easy to gain access to them.

Another limitation is the time difference between the data being collected and the findings presented, with the data, which included interviews with teachers from three sample schools and inspectors, collected during 2017 to 2018. Subsequently, the author suspended the study for personal reasons and resumed two years later, and despite suspending it for two years, the author had gained more exposure to inclusive education due to a change of work position. From the author's perspective, the data collected five years ago remained worthy of discussion and given that in the past five

years the primary concern has been in relation to the development of special education rather than inclusive education, such as building standard special education schools, publishing standard special education curricula and improving the enrollment rate of students with disabilities, the issues reflected in this study continue to be relevant.

The scope of the data collection is another limitation that may affect the results. Despite the claim that three methods were utilised to collect data, namely interview, observation and documentation review, there was significantly more reliance on the interviews and documentation reviews because the sample schools did not allow me to observe classes in which students with disabilities were present. The author was only able to observe empty resource rooms and classrooms, yet class observation could provide highly relevant data demonstrating what takes place in inclusive classes, thereby enhancing data validity.

6.4 Implications for Further Study

This study adopted a case study as its methodology to investigate the situation of the practice of LRC, yet the focus of this study is confined to the context of primary schools. It is acknowledged that the practice of LRC is seemingly more challenging in higher grades, such as secondary junior schools, senior high schools and vocational schools due to the competitive schooling system of China, therefore further studies could be conducted to review the practice of LRC in such schools. As discussed, students with special education needs are to spend the majority of the time in regular classrooms with their classmates, and only a fraction of the time are they to be taken from these classes and given individualised lessons, hence the quality of regular classes is closely related to the effectiveness of LRC. Since the author was not allowed to observe real classes in these schools, the data in relation to curricula adoption and teaching strategies modification was collected from the interviews with teachers rather than directly through class observation. Therefore, further studies may focus on real classes using classroom observation to uncover the difficulties that may hinder teachers making changes when instructing students with special education needs in regular classes.

In this study, ‘the Index of Inclusion’ was applied as the conceptual framework, while it is acknowledged that this was developed based on the context of western nations. One of the reasons for adopting it as the conceptual framework is that it offers rich material in terms of inclusive education. As stated in Chapter 2, the ‘index for inclusion’ comprises four elements: ‘key concepts’, ‘review framework’, ‘review materials’ and ‘an inclusive process’ (Booth & Ainscow, 2002, p.2), with the conceptual framework adopted in this study being the ‘review framework’ element. The ‘review materials’ framework contains many indicators that could be used to identify barriers and promote positive change in schools, while ‘an index process’, which provides a detailed description of how to develop an inclusive school, has been put into practice in many nations, such as Hong Kong. Nowadays, the inclusive education in Hong Kong is seen as one of the representatives of good practice in the region of Asia. In 2008, the government of Hong Kong revised ‘the Index of Inclusion’ and produced a localised guideline namely *Catering for students differences:Indicators for inclusion*. This guideline was then applied by many schools to evaluate their practice of inclusive education (Greenberg & Greenberg, 2014). It is well-known that Hong Kong and mainland China have many in common in terms of schooling. Similarly, they are also confronted with similar challenges of the implementation of inclusive education, for example, high competitive learning environment and large-size classes. Hong Kong’s successful experience of adopting the index makes us believe that the index will be very helpful to improve the practice of Learning in Regular Classes in mainland China. Therefore further studies focusing on ‘review materials’ and ‘the index process’ could be carried out and put into practice in the context of China.

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Appendix A：

University of Nottingham Ningbo

Research Ethics Checklist for Staff and Research Students

[strongly informed by the ESRC (2012) Framework for Research Ethics]

A checklist should be completed for every research project or thesis where the research involves the participation of people, the use of secondary datasets or archives relating to people and/or access to field sites or animals. It will be used to identify whether a full application for ethics approval needs to be submitted.
You must not begin data collection or approach potential research participants until you have completed this form, received ethical clearance, and submitted this form for retention with the appropriate administrative staff.

The principal investigator or, where theprincipal investigator is a student, the supervisor, is responsible for exercising appropriateprofessionaljudgement in this review.

Completing the form includes providing brief details about yourself and the research in Sections 1 and 2 and ticking some boxes in Sections 3 and/or 4, 5, 6. **Ticking a shaded box in Sections 3, 4, 5 or 6 requires further action by the researcher**. Two things need to be stressed:

- Ticking one or more shaded boxes does not mean that you cannot conduct your research as currently anticipated; however, it does mean that further questions will need to be asked and addressed, further discussions will need to take place, and alternatives may need to be considered or additional actions undertaken.
- Avoiding the shaded boxes does not mean that ethical considerations can subsequently be 'forgotten'; on the contrary, research ethics - for everyone and in every project – should involve an ongoing process of reflection and debate.

The following checklist is a starting point for an ongoing process of reflection about the ethical issues concerning your study.

SECTION 1: THE RESEARCHER(S)

1.1: Name of principal researcher:

1.2: Status: ☐ Staff

√ Postgraduate research student

1.3: School/Division: School of Education

1.4: Email address: Xiaojing.Jin@Nottingham.edu.cn

1.5: Names of other project members (if applicable):

1.6: Names of Supervisors (if applicable):Christine Hall

	Yes	No
1.7: I have read the University of Nottingham's Code ofResearch Conduct and Research Ethics (2010) and agree to abide by it: http://www.nottingham.edu.cn/en/research/researchethics/ethics-approval-process.aspx	√	☐

1.8: (If applicable) I have read the University of Nottingham's e- Ethics@Nottingham: Ethical Issues in Digitally Based Research (2012) and agree to abide by it. http://www.nottingham.edu.cn/en/research/documents/e-ethics-at-the-university-of-nottingham.pdf	√	☐
1.9: When conducting research on people (Section 5) I will prepare both a participant consent form as well as a *participant information sheet.* I am aware that the following templates are available on the Ethics webpage:http://www.nottingham.edu.cn/en/research/researchethics/ethics-approval-process.aspx • Participant consent form 1 • Participant Information Sheet English and Chinese	√	☐

SECTION 2: THE RESEARCH

2.1: **Title of project: The situation of 'Learning in Regular Classes' in Ningbo Schools**

Please provide brief details (50-150 words) about your proposed research, as indicated in each section

This research is designed to investigate the situation of 'Learning in Regular Classes'(LRC) in [redacted] schools. In this research, I will choose three schools which are implementing LRC and interview students with special needs, their teachers, their parents and head teachers in these schools to explore the success they have achieved, the challenges they are facing and the issues are arising during the process of the implementation of 'LRC'. The aim of my research is to give recommendations based on the data I will collect and help inclusive schools in [redacted] to better implement LRC.

2.2: **Research question(s) or aim(s)**

Research questions: What issues are arising as 'Learning in Regular Classrooms(LRC)' is being implemented in [redacted] schools?

How is LRC understood and implemented at school level?

What does LRC mean for students with special needs,their parents and their teachers?

The aim of this research is to help [redacted] inclusive schools to better implement LRC.

2.3: **Summary of method(s) of data collection**

Interview.

2.4: **Proposed site(s) of data collection**

The schools that the participants are working or studying will be the first choice. If the participants feel uncomfortable, we can negotiate and find other places.

2.5: **How will access to participants and/or sites be gained?**

The school I am working has some connections with all the inclusive schools in [redacted]. I will contact the principles and get his/her approval first.

SECTION 3: RESEARCH INVOLVING USE OF SECONDARY DATASETS OR ARCHIVES RELATING TO PEOPLE

If your research involves use of secondary datasets or archives relating to people all questions in Section 3 must be answered. If it does not, please tick the 'not relevant' box and go to Section 4.

NOT RELEVANT	☐

Please answer each question by ticking the appropriate box.

	Yes	No
3.1: Is the risk of disclosure of the identity of individuals low or non-existent in the use of this secondary data or archive?	√	☐
3.2: Have you complied with the data access requirements of the supplier (where relevant), including any provisions relating to presumed consent and potential risk of disclosure of sensitive information?	√	☐

SECTION 4: RESEARCH INVOLVING ACCESS TO FIELD SITES AND ANIMALS

If your research involves access to field sites and/or animals all questions in Section 4 must be answered. If it does not, please tick the 'not relevant' box and go to Section 5.

NOT RELEVANT	√

Please answer each question by ticking the appropriate box.

	Yes	No
4.1: Has access been granted to the site?	☐	☐
4.2: Does the site have an official protective designation of any kind?	☐	☐
If yes, have the user guidelines of the body managing the site a) been accessed?	☐	☐
b) been integrated into the research methodology?	☐	☐
4.3: Will this research place the site, its associated wildlife and other people using the site at any greater physical risks than are experienced during normal site usage?	☐	☐
4.4: Will this research involve the collection of any materials from the site?	☐	☐
4.5: Will this research expose the researcher(s) to any significant risk of physical or emotional harm?	☐	☐
4.6: Will the research involve vertebrate animals (fish, birds, reptiles, amphibians, mammals) or the common octopus (Octopus vulgaris) in any capacity?	☐	☐
If yes, will the research with vertebrates or octopi involve handling or interfering with the animal in any way or involve any activity that may cause pain, suffering, distress or lasting harm to the animal?	☐	☐

SECTION 5: RESEARCH INVOLVING THE PARTICIPATION OF PEOPLE

If your research involves the participation of people all questions in Section 4 must be answered.

Please answer each question by ticking the appropriate box.

A. General Issues

	Yes	No

5.1: Does the study involve participants age 16 or over who are unable to give informed consent? (e.g. people with cognitive impairment, learning disabilities, mental health conditions, physical or sensory impairments?	√	☐
5.2: Does the research involve other vulnerable groups such as children (**aged under 16**) or those in unequal relationships with the researcher? (e.g. your own students)	√	☐
5.3: Will this research require the cooperation of a gatekeeper* for initial access to the groups or individuals to be recruited?	√	☐
5.4: Will this research involve discussion of sensitive topics (e.g. sexual activity, drug use, physical or mental health)?	√	☐
5.5: Could the study induce psychological stress or anxiety or cause harm or negative consequences beyond the risks encountered in normal life?	☐	√
5.6: Are drugs, placebos or other substances (e.g. food substances, vitamins) to be administered to the study participants or will the study involve invasive, intrusive or potentially harmful procedures of any kind?	☐	√
5.7: Will this research involve people taking part in the study without their knowledge and consent at the time?	☐	√
5.8: Does this research involve the internet or other visual/vocal methods where people may be identified?	☐	√
5.9: Will this research involve access to personal information about identifiable individuals without their knowledge or consent?	☐	√
5.10: Does the research involve recruiting members of the public as researchers (participant research)?	☐	√
5.11: Will the research involve administrative or secure data that requires permission from the appropriate authorities before use?	☐	√
5.12: Is there a possibility that the safety of **the researcher** may be in question?	☐	√
5.13: Will financial inducements (other than reasonable expenses and compensation for time) be offered to participants?	☐	√

**Gatekeeper- a person who controls or facilitates access to the participants*

B. Before starting data collection

	Yes	No
6.12: My full identity will be revealed to all research participants.	√	☐
6.13: All participants will be given accurate information about the nature of the research and the purposes to which the data will be put. (*An example of a Participant Information Sheet is available for you to amend and use* at xxxxx) http://www.nottingham.edu.cn/en/research/documents/participant-information-sheet-in-english-and-chinese.doc	√	☐
6.14: All participants will freely consent to take part, and, where appropriate, this will be confirmed by use of a consent form. (An example of a Consent Form is available for you to amend and use at: http://www.nottingham.edu.cn/en/research/researchethics/ethics-approval-process.aspx)	√	☐
6.15: All participants will freely consent to take part, but due to the qualitative nature of the research a formal consent form is either not feasible or is undesirable and alternative means of recording consent are proposed.	√	☐
6.16: A signed copy of the consent form or (where appropriate) an alternative record of evidence of consent will be held by the researcher.	√	☐

6.17: It will be made clear that declining to participate will have no negative consequences for the individual.	√	☐
6.18: Participants will be asked for permission for quotations (from data) to be used in research outputs where this is intended.	√	☐
6.19: I will inform participants how long the data collected from them will be kept.	√	☐
6.20: Incentives (other than basic expenses) will be offered to potential participants as an inducement to participate in the research. (Here any incentives include cash payments and non-cash items such as vouchers and book tokens.)	☐	√
6.21: For research conducted within, or concerning, organisations (e.g. universities, schools, hospitals, care homes, etc) I will gain authorisation in advance from an appropriate committee or individual.	√	☐

C. During the process of data collection

	Yes	No
6.25: I will provide participants with my University contact details, and those of my supervisor (*where applicable*) so that they may get in touch about any aspect of the research if they wish to do so.	√	☐
6.26: Participants will be guaranteed anonymity only insofar as they do not disclose any illegal activities.	√	☐
6.27: Anonymity will not be guaranteed where there is disclosure or evidence of significant harm, abuse, neglect or danger to participants or to others.	√	☐
6.28: All participants will be free to withdraw from the study at any time, including withdrawing data following its collection.	√	☐
6.29: Data collection will take place only in public and/or professional spaces (e.g. in a work setting	√	☐
6.30: Research participants will be informed when observations and/or recording is taking place.	√	☐
6.31: Participants will be treated with dignity and respect at all times.	√	☐

D. After collection of data

	Yes	No
6.32: Where anonymity has been agreed with the participant, data will be anonymised as soon as possible after collection.	√	☐
6.33: All data collected will be stored in accordance with the requirements of the University's Code of Research Conduct	√	☐
6.34: Data will only be used for the purposes outlined within the participant information sheet and the agreed terms of consent.	√	☐
6.35: Details which could identify individual participants will not be disclosed to anyone other than the researcher, their supervisor and (if necessary) the Research Ethics Panel and external examiners without participants' explicit consent.	√	☐

E. After completion of research

	Yes	No
6.37: Participants will be given the opportunity to know about the overall research findings.	√	☐
6.38: All hard copies of data collection tools and data which enable the identification of individual participants will be destroyed.	√	☐

If you have not ticked any shaded boxes, please send the completed and signed form to the School's Research Ethics Officers, with any further required documents, for approval and record-keeping.

If you have ticked *any* shaded boxes **you will need to describe more fully how you plan to deal with the ethical issues raised by your research**. Issues to consider in preparing an ethics review are given below. Please send this completed form to the Research EthicsOfficer who will decide whether your project requires further review by the UNNC Research Ethics Sub-Committee and/or whether further information needs to be provided.
Please note that it is your responsibility to follow the University's Research Code of Conduct and any relevant academic or professional guidelines in the conduct of your study. This includes providingappropriate information sheets and consent forms, and ensuring confidentiality in the storage anduse of data. For guidance and UK regulations on the latter, please refer to the Data Protection Policy andGuidelines of the University of Nottingham:

Policy - http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/%7Ebrzdpa/local/dp-policy.doc

Guidelines -http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/~brzdpa/local/dp-guidance.doc

Since students with special needs will be involved in my research, and all of them are children under 16, before interviewing these students, I will explain to their parents the objectives of the research and the rights they have and gain consent from their parents.

To protect the privacy of participants, all the students will be recorded with anonymity. Their real names will not be presented either on research report or on recorded paper. Moreover, all the data collected from the research will be stored in a locked computer, and only the researcher has access to these data.

Also I will get participants' oral approval if the formal consent is not feasible.

Any significant change in the project question(s), design or conduct over the course of the research should be notified to the School Research Ethics Officer and may require a new application for ethical approval.

Signature of Principal Investigator/Researcher:金晓菁
Signature of Supervisor (where appropriate):Christine Hall
Date December 1st 2015

Research Ethics Panel response

X☐the research can go ahead as planned

☐ further information is needed on the research protocol (see details below)

☐ amendments are requested to the research protocol (see details below)

School REO…  (John Lowe) Date: December 1, 2015

A. LIST OF POINTS TO CONSIDER WHEN SUBMITTING AN ETHICS REVIEW (taken from ESRC (2012) Framework for Research Ethics).

Risks
1. Have you considered risks to:
the research team?
the participants? Eg harm, deception, impact of outcomes
the data collected? Eg storage, considerations of privacy, quality

the research organisations, project partners and funders involved?
2. Might anyone else be put at risk as a consequence of this research?
3. What might these risks be?
4. How will you protect your data at the research site and away from the research site?
5. How can these risks be addressed?

Details and recruitment of participants
6. What types of people will be recruited? Eg students, children, people with learning disabilities, elderly?
7. How will the competence of participants to give informed consent be determined?
8. How, where, and by whom participants will be identified, approached, and recruited?
9. Will any unequal relationships exist between anyone involved in the recruitment and the potential participants?
10. Are there any benefits to participants?
11. Is there a need for participants to be de-briefed? By whom?

Research information
12. What information will participants be given about the research?
13. Who will benefit from this research?
14. Have you considered anonymity and confidentiality?
15. How will you store your collected data?
16. How will data be disposed of and after how long?
17. Are there any conflicts of interest in undertaking this research? Eg financial reward for outcomes etc.
18. Will you be collecting information through a third party?

Consent
19. Have you considered consent?
20. If using secondary data, does the consent from the primary data cover further analysis?
21. Can participants opt out?
22. Does your information sheet (or equivalent) contain all the information participants need?
23. If your research changes, how will consent be renegotiated?

Ethical procedures
24. Have you considered ethics within your plans for dissemination/impact?
25. Are there any additional issues that need to be considered ?Eg local customs, local ‘gatekeepers’, political sensitivities
26. Have you considered the time you need to gain ethics approval?
27. How will the ethics aspects of the project be monitored throughout its course?
28. Is there an approved research ethics protocol that would be appropriate to use?
29. How will unforeseen or adverse events in the course of research be managed? Eg do you have procedures to deal with any disclosures from vulnerable participants?

Appendix B

Interview protocol for vice principals(administrators)

Entrance

Could you tell me how many students with special needs have been admitted to your school?

Which grades are they in?

What kinds of disabilities do they have?

When they were enrolled by the school, were you clear they were students with special education needs?

When you enrolled students, did you use particular criteria to select them? If yes, what were they?

School accommodation

Have you taken some measures to help those students with special needs to better adapt to the life in school? If yes, could you tell me what are they?

How successful have these measures been? Which ones work best? Which work less well?

Do the teachers have additional training about special education? If yes, could you tell me more about what this training consists of and how often it takes place? If no, could you explain why you feel this hasn't be necessary or possible?

Resource classroom

Do you have resource classroom?

Could you explain how and when the resource classroom is used?

Do you have specialist resource teachers? If yes, could you explain their role and how many there are? If no, could you explain how you use the resource classroom?

How often do the students with special needs come to resource classroom?

What do they do in resource classroom?

Others

I would be grateful if you could talk to me a bit about your views on ‘learning in regular classes’

Appendix C

Interview protocol for class teachers and resource teachers

1. Entrance

1.1 Could you tell me how many students with special needs in your class?

1.2 What kinds of disabilities do they have? Tell me about the students.

2. School accommodation

2.1 Have you taken some measures to help those students with special needs to better adapt to the life in school? If yes, could you tell me what are they?

2.2 How successful have these measures been? Which ones work best? Which work less well?

2.3 Do the teachers have additional training about special education? If yes, could you tell me more about what this training consists of and how often it takes place? If no, could you explain why you feel this hasn't be necessary or possible?

3. Resource classroom

3.1 Do you have resource classroom?

3.2 Could you explain how and when the resource classroom is used?

3.3 Do you have specialist resource teachers? If yes, could you explain their role and how many there are? If no, could you explain how you use the resource classroom?

3.4 How often do the students with special needs come to resource classroom?

3.5 What do they do in resource classroom?

4. Others

4.1 I would be grateful if you could talk to me a bit about your views on 'learning in regular classes'…

Appendix D

Interview protocol for inspectors

1. How did you conduct inspections?

2. What did you see and what did you hear during this inspection?

3. Could you say something that impressed you most?

4. Do you have any suggestions for those inclusive schools or for policies?

Appendix E

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Project title.....The Situation of 'Learning in Regular Classes' in [redacted]

Researcher's name.....Jin Xiaojing.....

Supervisor's name.....Christine Hall.....

• I have read the Participant Information Sheet and the nature and purpose of the research project has been explained to me. I understand and agree to take part.

• I understand the purpose of the research project and my involvement in it.

• I understand that I may withdraw from the research project at any stage and that this will not affect my status now or in the future.

• I understand that while information gained during the study may be published, I will not be identified and my personal results will remain confidential.

• I understand that the interview will be recorded.

• I understand that data will be stored in accordance with data protection laws.

• I understand that I may contact the researcher or supervisor if I require more information about the research, and that I may contact the Research Ethics Sub-Committee of the University of Nottingham, Ningbo if I wish to make a complaint related to my involvement in the research.

Signed.....(participant)

Print name.....Date .....

Contact details

Researcher: [Xiaojing. Jin@nottingham.edu.cn]

Supervisor: [Christine. Hall@)nottingham.edu.cn]

UNNC Research Ethics Sub-Committee Coordinator:
Joanna.Huang@nottingham.edu.cn

参与者同意书（in Chinese）

项目标题 ….[redacted]地区 “随班就读”开展情况的调查研究……

研究者姓名……金晓菁……

导师姓名.....Christine Hall……

●本人已阅读声明，项目组织者已经向我解释了研究项目的性质和宗旨。本人理解并同意参与。
●本人理解项目的目的和在项目中的参与作用。
●本人明白可以在研究项目的任何阶段退出，不会因此影响现在以及将来的状况。
●本人明白研究过程中信息可能会被公开，但本人身份不会被确认，个人的调查结果始终是
被保密。
●本人知道面谈将会被录音。
●本人了解数据会根据数据保护相关法律进行存储。
●本人知道，如果需要进一步有关研究的信息可以联系研究者或者导师，如果需要对参与研究提出投诉则可以联系宁波诺丁汉大学科研伦理小组委员会。

参与者签名……

日期……

联系方式
研究者：<金晓菁 Xiaojing. Jin(onottingham.edu.cn>
导师：<MS Christine Hall Christine. Hallanottingham.edu.cn>

诺丁汉大学研究道德委员会秘书：Ms Joanna Fuang CIoanna.Fluang
(@nottingham.edu.on)

Example of participant consent form

参与者同意书

项目标题 .....[redacted]地区 “随班就读”开展情况的调查研究.....

研究者姓名 .....金晓菁.....

导师姓名 .....Christine Hall.....

- 本人已阅读声明，项目组织者已经我解释了研究项目的性质和宗旨。本人理解并同意参与。
- 本人理解项目的目的和在项目中的参与作用。
- 本人明白可以在研究项目的任何阶段退出，不会因此影响现在以及将来的状况
- 本人明白研究过程中信息可能会被公开，但本人身份不会被确认，个人的调查结果始终是被保密。
- 本人知道面谈将会被录音
- 本人了解数据会根据数据保护相关法律进行存储
- 本人知道，如果需要进一步有关研究的信息可以联系研究者或者导师，如果需要对参与研究提出投诉则可以联系宁波诺丁汉大学科研伦理小组委员会。

参与者签名.....

日期.....2017.12.13.....

联系方式

研究者：<金晓菁 Xiaojing. Jin@nottingham.edu.cn>

导师：<MS Christine Hall Christine. Hall@nottingham.edu.cn>

诺丁汉大学研究道德委员会秘书：Ms Joanna Huang (Joanna.Huang@nottingham.edu.cn)

Appendix F

The main information about the participants

School	Name	Position	Working experience	Information related to LRC
Haihong Primary School	Hong	The dean of studies	20 years	in charge of the implementation of LRC for more than ten years; teach a student with SEN
	Zhang	Class teacher of Grade Two Resource teacher	14 years	has one students with SEN and another two students who may have some problems in their study and behavior
Dongfang Primary School	Sun	Vice principal	More than 15 years	majored in psychology; the founder and director of Special Education Resource Guidance Center of Fangxian District
	Qiu	Class teacher of Grade Two	4 years	has two students with special education needs(SEN)
	Qin	Resource teacher	5 years	majored in psychology; a full-time resource teacher
Zipu Primary School	Yang	Vice principal	More than 20 years	the school is one of the first pilot schools of the implement of the LRC of Zixian District; in charge of the implementation of the LRC for more than five years

	Chun	Class teacher of Grade six	More than 20 years	has one student with SEN
	Yiwei	Resource teacher	Around 16 years	takes the position of resource teacher since 2015
A special education school	Jun	Inspector	More than 20 years	majored in special education; the dean of studies
	Fang	Inspector	More than 30 years	majored in special education; an office administrator
	Yan	Inspector	more than thirty years	the vice principal of a regular school five years ago and now the vice principal of a special education school
	Ming	Inspector	more than 15 years working experience	majored in special education; an administrator of Jiangzhou Special Education Guidance Center
	Chai	Inspector	More than 20 years	the director and founder of Jiangzhou Special Education Guidance Center; the drafter of municipal documents concerning the LRC; the vice-principal of a special education school

Appendix G

An example of interview themes, sub-themes and quotes

Themes	Sub-themes	Quotes
Teachers' attitudes towards students with special education needs (SEN)	Negative	'He has a poor memory. He always forgets what has been taught. Learning Chinese requires memorizing a lot of knowledge, so he learns it very slowly. Moreover, he has poor coordination. He has poor coordination in running and he could not skip rope before this semester.' 'Having children like them, I need to spend a lot of energy to deal with the parents of other students.' 'it would be better to have fewer such students and then my job would seem to get easier. Sometimes it is really troublesome to deal with some affairs.' 'he cannot have dinner. He cannot do morning exercises and has low coordination ability. He cannot write. He even cannot write his own name up to now. As for other respects, there are a lot things that he cannot do. He has lower abilities than others in every respect.' 'We have talked with his parents to see if they could transfer him into a special education school.'
	Neutral	'The boy is out-going but sometimes he makes some trouble. ' 'The girl, on the contrary, is quiet and rarely talks to or plays with others.' In terms of daily life, it is not a big problem for them, they can both take care of themselves'
	Positive	'It is very miserable for the students to sit still in the classes, since they cannot move or concentrate on what teachers are talking. They might become frustrated if there was no additional support from resource rooms... however, we usually conduct instructions with ratio of one teacher to two students. We are more familiar with students, and we usually praise and encourage them. In terms of study and activities, we also pay much attention on them, help them and show the kindness of us. ' 'It gives me a sense of achievements. Some minor improvements, maybe their parents do not notice. But I can feel it.'

		‘We do not pay much attention on students’ scores or academic performance in the school. Instead, we pay more attention on their all-around development. Some students have problems on their sensory integration. Perhaps, it is really difficult for them to be outstanding among the students. I only can say compared to the condition before they are improving.’