

The Special Education Efficacy of Teachers in Regular Classes in the Context of Inclusive Education

Sichun Yang

The University of Sydney, Sydney,
NSW, Australia
sichun1919@gmail.com

Abstract:

As inclusive education gains momentum globally and within China, general classroom teachers are pivotal to its successful implementation. Grounded in Bandura's theory of self-efficacy, this study investigates the current state, influencing factors, and enhancement strategies for the self-efficacy of general education teachers in inclusive classrooms. Utilizing a sequential exploratory mixed-methods design, the research first conducted semi-structured interviews with 18 teachers to gather rich qualitative data, which informed the development of a quantitative questionnaire assessing four key dimensions of efficacy: classroom management, instructional strategies, home-school collaboration, and professional collaboration. The findings reveal that while teachers employ adaptive strategies like differentiated instruction and technology integration, their efficacy is significantly challenged by insufficient specialized training, large class sizes, limited parental collaboration, and inadequate institutional resources. The study concludes that bolstering teacher self-efficacy requires a multi-level approach, proposing concrete recommendations for continuous teacher professional development, enhanced school support systems, and strengthened policy guarantees to foster a more effective and sustainable inclusive education environment.

Keywords: Inclusive Education, Self-Efficacy, Mainstream Classrooms, Special Educational Needs, Educational Policy

1. Introduction

Inclusive education is becoming a major course of action in most of the world. The United Nations Convention for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

(CRPD, 2006) recommends that children with disabilities ought to be equally included in education at general schools. Increasing numbers of students with SEN have entered regular classes in China since the Special Education Improvement Plan of 2017-2020.

It demonstrates the development of equality, but places pressure on teachers, who have to instruct heterogeneous groups under-resourced.

Bandura introduced the concept of “self-efficacy” through social cognitive theory. It is the belief of an individual in his/her ability to perform a task [1]. Teachers’ self-efficacy in schools may influence their attitude towards teaching, classroom control, and students’ achievement [2]. Other past studies have also shown that among teachers of inclusive classrooms, teacher efficacy is the predictor of adopting the inclusive approach and of students’ level of assistance. Scarcely among the past studies, however, included regular classroom teachers, not special education teachers, and in China’s exam-dominated system, this gap is evident even more.

Research has found that many factors affect teacher efficacy. These include personal background (training, experience, attitude), school support, and outside conditions like parent involvement, social opinion, and education policy [3]. How these factors interact to shape regular teachers’ sense of efficacy in inclusive classrooms is still not fully understood.

This study wants to address that gap. It explores how effective regular teachers are in inclusive settings, what factors affect them, and how schools and policies can help. The goal is to give useful ideas for both practice and theory. The results can guide China and other countries in developing stronger support for inclusive education.

2. Method

2.1 Theoretical Basis

Theoretically, this study is largely based on Bandura’s self-efficacy theory [1]. Self-efficacy is the belief of an individual in performing specific tasks effectively. Teachers’ self-efficacy, in the education field, directly affects teachers’ classroom control measures, educational attitudes, and students’ learning achievement [4]. Teachers’ special education self-efficacy, from the perspective of inclusive education, specifically denotes general education teachers’ belief in performing favourably for SEN students in the classroom. It has been shown through past studies that teachers’ sense of efficaciousness in the area of inclusive education not only affects their own feelings and teaching practices, but students’ learning achievement and social-emotional growth are closely linked to teachers’ sense of efficaciousness in inclusive education as well [2]. Moreover, self-efficacy levels have significant connections with teachers’ education background, training experience, and supporting school environment [3]. Accordingly, this

study applies a multidimensional framework in examining the current situation and determining factors of self-efficacy among general classroom teachers.

This work borrows Bandura’s self-efficacy model [1]. Self-efficacy refers to the belief by individuals in their ability to perform tasks. Teachers’ self-efficacy in teaching influences control of the class, teaching morale, and students’ achievement [4]. Special education self-efficacy in inclusive schools refers to the level of belief by regular teachers in their ability to take care of SEN students. Teacher efficacy, according to researchers, influences both teachers’ feelings and their behavioral response in teaching and is closely tied to students’ learning and social-emotional development [2]. Teacher self-efficacy is further mediated through training, personal background, and school encouragement [3]. Against this, the work adopts a multi-dimensional approach in taking into account teacher self-efficacy

2.2 Framework and Dimension Construction

In order to reflect the multi-dimensional character of teachers’ self-efficacy in inclusive schools, it included frameworks of the available international scales, e.g., Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale for Special Educational Needs (TSSES-SEN) and the Inclusive Education Self-Efficacy Scale (IESSES) in this study. By conducting a review of the literature and investigating the theories, four interlinked dimensions were discovered:

The first factor is Classroom Management Efficacy, meaning teachers’ perceived proficiency in maintaining classroom order, resolving behavioral issues, and achieving a smooth learning environment while teaching students of varying needs. It is studied that the size of the class and the need for order-keeping in mixed-ability classes are two of the urgent issues for general education teachers [5]. It is Instructional Strategy Efficacy, which indicates teachers’ belief in the use of differentiated learning strategies and offering student-centered assistance for children with SEN. Teachers who possess a high level of instructional efficacy would be more inclined toward designing activities appropriate to students’ differences and adopting new practices like the use of information technology or peer learning. It was noticed by the researchers, Zeng, Wang, and Li, that the teachers holding higher self-efficacy tend toward experiments on adaptive learning strategies [3].

The third factor is home-school cooperation effectiveness, which is teachers’ belief in communicating effectively with students’ special-needs parents and establishing partnership relationships promoting students’ learning and well-being. Recent findings indicate that families’ involvement is significant in inclusion education, but there

is, nonetheless, resistance among certain parents for students with special needs' entry into general classes, and it is problematic for teachers [6].

The fourth dimension is of collaborative efficacy, which is teachers' perceived ability to work alongside their colleagues (special education teachers, school support staff, and outside professionals). Collaborative practices are commonly seen as central to inclusion since these involve the sharing of knowledge and resources. Tschannen-Moran and Hoy discovered that teachers who participated in collaborative practices tended, overall, to report higher levels of general efficacy [4].

By expressly locating these four dimensions in the context of inclusive education, the framework offers a holistic and context-responsive ground for measuring the self-efficacy of general classroom teachers. Not only does it capture the multidimensional character of teacher efficaciousness, but it also serves as a yardstick for later interview design and data analysis.

2.3 Research Design

This study uses a qualitative approach supported by some quantitative tools, so that the results can be both detailed and reliable. The main sources of data are interviews with teachers and a questionnaire that measures their feelings of confidence in teaching students with special educational needs (SEN).

2.3.1 Semi-structured interviews

The initial phase of this research utilized semi-structured interviews in exploring the issues and strategies of general education teachers within inclusive education. This was utilized to offer rich, contextualized views. The interview format was constructed based on the four dimensions of teacher efficacy as determined in the initial phase.

Participants were 18 mainstream teachers from rural and urban primary and middle schools who were chosen to represent a range of teaching settings and experience. Each 40-60 minute interview was audio-taped after informed consent.

Transcripts of interviews were coded rigorously, theme identification, and refinement using Braun and Clark's thematic analysis approach [7]. Overall themes from the qualitative findings were teachers' common issues presented, such as problems of gigantic class sizes, improper parental participation, and the availability of resources.

The results of the interviews not only elicited teachers' actual experiences but also enriched subsequent questionnaire design by improving its specificity and contextuality. The most frequently cited topics were integrated into the survey questionnaire precisely in order to maintain its

contextuality.

2.3.2 Questionnaire survey

Following the interviews, a 20-item questionnaire was developed to investigate the universality and generalizability of the themes established. The "Special Education Efficacy Questionnaire for Mainstream Classroom Teachers" evaluates four domains: classroom management, instruction strategies, parent collaboration, and cooperative practices. All items are rated on a five-point Likert scale from 1 ("Not at all confident") to 5 ("Highly confident").

Questionnaires were distributed to a larger sample of teachers in typical elementary and middle schools to take in diverse instructional contexts. Descriptive statistical summarization reflected average levels of efficacy, while group contrasts examined differences. For instance, training effects were established by comparing participants who received inclusive education training with those who did not.

A sequential exploratory design supported complementarity between the two designs. The qualitative interviews provided rich experiential insight that informed questionnaire development. Quantitative surveys replicated these findings and generalised them to the general population. Through the integration of qualitative depth with quantitative breadth, this design maximised the reliability and validity of the study.

2.4 Data Analysis

Interview responses will be assessed via thematic analysis. This means a close reading of the interview transcripts, highlighting meaningful quotes from the transcription, identifying elements, and summarizing the quotes within themes and sub-themes that reflect the overall trends in the data. The themes will then be considered against the four dimensions of the framework to ascertain matching considerations in constructs.

The questionnaire data will be summarized using basic descriptive statistics (correlating to mean, e.g., differences between teacher groups, and so forth). For example, the researcher may consider differences between teachers who received special education training and those who do not to further validate or confirm if the teacher training course creates a difference in teacher self-efficacy. Ultimately, the combination of qualitative and quantitative data collection methods listed will create an ultimately richer and clearer story of teachers' real-world contexts in relation to inclusive education.

3. Result and Analysis

3.1 Teaching Methods

Both the literature review and interview findings confirm that the strategies employed by general education teachers align with the four dimensions of teacher efficacy proposed in the framework.

3.1.1 Teaching strategy effectiveness

Teachers exhibited a strong inclination to differentiate instruction for student needs. Instructional work completed by the participant teachers was often in varying degrees of difficulty, so all students at various ability levels could engage with the classroom work. Peer tutoring and group work collaboration were also evident as students were to produce a product together as a group, so a student with special educational needs could learn from a peer, in addition to developing the output to fulfill the group's expectations. Various participants mentioned their experiences with differentiated work and abilities, including types of assignments. For example, one participant (Teacher A) said, "I usually would prepare two levels of the same work so that both the advanced learners, and also the students that needed some additional assistance could be doing the same type of work.", etc. The finding of students or peers helping one another was also consistent with the principles articulated in the questionnaire, where 72% of respondents indicated they always or often developed differentiated learning tasks. These findings also fit into the current research as teachers exhibited higher self-efficacy for using flexible teaching strategies like peer learning and differentiated assignments [2].

3.1.2 Classroom management efficacy

The teachers in this study often stated that they use technology-assisted learning as a way to support classroom management. The teachers stated that the use of digital platforms and an app with a few students with SEN allowed those students to learn at their own pace, while also decreasing distractions and disruptions in the classroom. For example, one teacher (Teacher B) mentioned, "When students are working on the tablet exercises, it is quiet and calm, and I can focus on helping to guide the whole group." Likewise, the survey showed about 65% of teachers (N=49) also agreed that integrating technology-based learning into the curriculum improved their efficacy in classroom management. These data points reflected the previous findings that when teachers felt confident, they felt greater efficacy while using a digital tool effectively as part of their management practices [3].

3.1.3 Parent collaboration effectiveness

Although not as evident, a few teachers stated that the home-school collaboration or communication was something they used when making instructional choices. For example, one of the participants articulated, "When parents give me feedback about a routine during homework, I can make adjustments to the homework tasks and work in class accordingly." Similarly, this was noted as not being as prevalent in the survey. In the survey, 58% of respondents stated that parent-student feedback occasionally impacted how they implemented the differentiation system as part of their instructional strategy. It is relevant across the Liu and Xu framework dimension, as above school and outside of school, the encouragement of parent involvement is important to promote the notion of the differentiated homework and modelling outside of the classroom [7].

3.1.4 Collaborative effectiveness

Another outcome of collaboration between teachers and peers within the classroom is emotional and social support. Teachers believe that giving feedback and encouragement, and a sense of identity, are just as important as academic support. One participant (Teacher C) summed it up well: "Because if SEN students feel that their peers identify them, they would be more willing to participate in group activities." The survey also supported these findings, as 70% of the participants felt that peer collaboration was a successful means to promote students' social-emotional engagement. This aligns with the existing literature that supports teacher efficacy in support of students' social-emotional development.

Overall, these findings demonstrate that teachers are working to meet the needs of students with special educational needs. However, how teachers support students with special educational needs is strongly influenced by teachers' self-efficacy. Teachers who possess high self-efficacy tend to use a range of different, creative, and flexible teaching methods. Conversely, teachers with low self-efficacy lean toward more traditional or simplistic methods.

3.2 Shortcomings and Obstacles

Despite positive efforts, teachers face many difficulties. These problems limit their ability to fully support SEN students.

The primary challenge is the lack of professional training and knowledge. Most general teachers said they have not received enough training in special education. They feel unsure about designing individual education plans (IEPs) or using specific strategies. This makes many teachers feel unprepared when teaching SEN students, and sometimes even anxious. Studies also show that without targeted

training, teachers feel less confident and avoid inclusive practices [5].

The second obstacle is the large class size and time pressure. Many schools have more than 40 students per class. Teachers struggle to give attention to SEN students while managing the rest. The heavy workload of lesson preparation, grading, and admin tasks also reduces the time for planning. Even motivated teachers find it hard to apply inclusive methods fully.

The third issue is the weak collaboration between parents. Parent support is uneven. Some support inclusive education, but others worry about its effect on academic results. Parents of regular students fear that SEN students take too much teacher attention, while parents of SEN students doubt regular schools' ability to help. These conflicts make home-school communication hard. Research confirms that parent support is key to success, but actual support varies [6].

The fourth major challenge lies in the insufficient school resources and institutional support. Teachers often report that schools lack resource teachers, teaching assistants, or equipment. Training opportunities are also rare. With little support, teachers feel alone and overloaded. This weakens both their confidence and their willingness to try inclusive practices. International research also shows that supportive schools and teamwork improve teacher efficacy [8].

Overall, these problems show that teacher efficacy depends not only on personal skills but also on broader school and social systems. Teachers in well-supported schools feel more confident. Teachers in resource-poor schools, even if motivated, often feel stressed and unable to cope.

Therefore, the results highlight a gap: teachers want to use creative strategies like differentiation, technology, and emotional support, but are blocked by limited training, large classes, weak parent collaboration, and poor school resources. Teacher efficacy is shaped by personal confidence, preparation, parent support, and institutional backing.

4. Suggestion

Building upon the four dimensions of teacher effectiveness outlined earlier—classroom management, instructional strategies, home-school collaboration, and professional collaboration—this section proposes recommendations across three interconnected levels: teachers, schools, and policy.

4.1 Teacher Level

Teachers need ongoing training to build professional

knowledge and confidence in supporting SEN students. Targeted training helps them design differentiated tasks and manage diverse needs. Teachers should also keep reflection habits, such as writing teaching journals or discussing with peers. These practices improve classroom management and collaboration. Past studies show that teachers who keep learning improve their efficacy and are more willing to use inclusive practices [9].

4.2 School Level

Schools must provide stronger institutional support. Regular and special education teachers should work together to improve collaboration. Teaching assistants and assistive tools can reduce workloads and allow teachers to focus more on students. Schools should also create a supportive culture that encourages sharing experiences and peer support [8]. This makes teachers feel more confident and improves both collaboration and parent engagement.

4.3 Policy Level

Governments and education authorities need to strengthen the system. Inclusive education should be included in teacher certification and continuous training. More funding should go to hiring resource teachers and buying assistive equipment. Public campaigns can also help reduce parental resistance and improve social acceptance. These steps will raise teachers' instructional, collaborative, and home-school collaboration efficacy while reducing classroom management difficulties.

Improving teacher efficacy needs action from teachers, schools, and policymakers together. By linking these steps to the four dimensions, this framework shows how to make inclusive education more effective in practice.

5. Conclusion

This research investigates regular class teachers' confidence and self-efficacy in terms of supporting students with special educational needs (SEN). The research found that teachers often utilize strategies such as differentiated teaching, technology use, and emotional support; however, various constraints, such as lack of professional learning, experience, home-school collaboration, and resources, result in the position of teacher efficacy as dependent not only on individuals but systems and social contexts.

The study also extends the theoretical framework of self-efficacy to inclusive education and considers the multi-dimensional nature of teacher efficacy. In addition, the study offers practical applications suggesting that teachers must participate in ongoing training and reflection, that schools build a comprehensive support system

in collaborative partnerships, and that policymakers are needed to allocate resources, holistic training, and awareness. During my internship, I observed that teachers who provided consistent support for the learning of students with special educational needs are more inclined to innovate and maintain inclusive practices; therefore, enhancing teacher efficacy is paramount to enhancing inclusive practice. It is only through teacher, school, and policy collaboration can every child can experience equitable outcomes and opportunities to learn, and inclusive education is actualized.

References

- [1] Bandura A. Self-efficacy: The exercise of control. Freeman, 1997.
- [2] Yada A, Leskinen M, Savolainen H, et al. Meta-analysis of the relationship between teachers' self-efficacy and attitudes toward inclusive education. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 2022, 109: 103521.
- [3] Zeng Y, Wang Y, Li S. The relationship between teachers' information technology integration self-efficacy and TPACK: A meta-analysis. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 2022, 13: 1091017.
- [4] Tschannen-Moran M, Hoy A W. Teacher efficacy: Capturing an elusive construct. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 2001, 17(7): 783-805.
- [5] Täschner J, Dicke T, Reinhold S, et al. «Yes, I can!» A systematic review and meta-analysis of intervention studies promoting teacher self-efficacy. *Review of Educational Research*, 2025, 95(1): 3-52.
- [6] Braun V, Clarke V. Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 2006, 3(2): 77-101.
- [7] Liu L, & Xu Z. The influence of organizational support on regular school teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education: The mediating role of self-efficacy. *Education Observation*, 2023.
- [8] Nottingham University. Factors influencing teacher self-efficacy for inclusive education: A systematic literature review. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 2022, 117: Article 103800.
- [9] Sahli Lozano C, Wüthrich S, Kullmann H, et al. How do attitudes and self-efficacy predict teachers' intentions to use inclusive practices? A cross-national comparison between Canada, Germany, Greece, Italy, and Switzerland. *Exceptionality Education International*, 2024, 34(1): 17-41.