



Which inclusive teaching tasks represent the highest level of teacher efficacy in primary and secondary schools?

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HIGHLIGHTS

- A hierarchy of inclusive teaching tasks by teacher efficacy level was derived.
- Collaboration tasks represented higher efficacy than the other two domains.
- Managing behavior represented the least teacher efficacy in secondary school.
- Using inclusive instruction represented the least efficacy in primary school.

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ABSTRACT

A hierarchy of inclusive teaching tasks by associated level of teacher efficacy is derived from a group of primary and secondary school teachers in Hong Kong using a Rasch rating scale model on 536 in-service teachers attending a professional development course. Findings show collaboration tasks represented the highest teacher efficacy in primary and secondary teachers. Managing behavior represented the lowest level of teacher efficacy but slightly more in primary than in secondary school. Hence, future training regarding inclusive practices should be specific to the school level, with a strong focus on collaborations between school, parents, and the community.

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1. Introduction

Inclusive education has been an important long-term goal in education policies and reforms in many countries in the past few decades (Ainscow, Sandill, Miles, & Singal, 2009; Miles & Singal, 2009; de Boer, Pijl, & Minnaert, 2011). Rafferty, Boettcher, and Griffin (2001) conceptualised inclusion as educating children with special education needs (SEN) according to their specific needs in regular schools, which they would attend if they did not have a

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disability. Typical daily teaching practices include the use of inclusive instructions, managing students' behaviours, and collaborating with others in the context of inclusive education (Sharma, Loreman, & Frolin, 2012). The implementation has been reported to be highly challenging for teachers (Jordan, Schwartz, & McGhie-Richmond, 2009) despite the numerous social values inclusive education promotes (Arnesen & Lundahl, 2006; Lalvani, 2012).

The number of students in Hong Kong identified with SEN has increased drastically from 18,000 students in 2009 to 28,630 students in 2011/12 (Leung & Tse, 2009). They include students with autism, hearing impairment, visual impairment, intellectual disability, speech, and language impairment, physical disability, specific learning difficulties or attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (Education Bureau (EDB) (2014). Approximately 80% of these

students were studying in ordinary schools ('ordinary' is the term used in Hong Kong for regular schools). The number of special schools has decreased from 73 (in 2003) to a stable 60 since 2008. These schools catered to 7904 students in 2013 (7834 in local special schools and 70 in an international school), indicating a noticeable reduction from 10,082 in 2003. Moreover, only four schools were facilitating special classes for students with moderate learning difficulties and only 61 primary or secondary school students enrolled in these schools in 2013/14 (EDB, 2013).

1.1. Inclusive education in Hong Kong

With the first pilot scheme on integrated education launched in 1997, Hong Kong has witnessed a number of positive moves towards improved opportunities for inclusion over the past decades (Chao, Forlin, & Ho, 2016; Forlin & Sin, 2010; Forlin, 2010; Forlin, Sin, & Maclean, 2013). The Disability Discrimination Ordinance (DDO) enacted in 1996 aims at eliminating and preventing discrimination against persons with disabilities. It seeks to ensure persons with disabilities have equal opportunities in accessing local education and applies to a wide range of persons, 'including those usually referred to as persons with intellectual disability or mental handicap, autism, specific learning disabilities, hearing impairment, visual impairment, physical disability or handicap, mental illness, and various other chronic illnesses ...' (DDO, Chapter. 489, 1996, p.1–2). According to the DDO, the Code of Practice on Education has also been issued by the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC). Although not legally binding, all primary and secondary schools in Hong Kong are encouraged to follow the recommended practices to ensure equal learning opportunities.

The current government policy towards students with SEN is a 'Whole School Approach to Integrated Education' (EDB, 2010), which emphasises the involvement of different parties in schools to help students with or without SEN, develop themselves, and embrace different challenges in learning and life (EDB, 2010).

The Education Bureau of Hong Kong (2014) encourages Hong Kong schools to adopt the three-tier intervention model to cater to students with SEN. Tier-1 support includes quality teaching in the regular classroom to help students with mild or transient learning difficulties. Tier-2 support involves students with persistent learning difficulties and includes 'add-on' intervention. Tier-3 support develops individual educational plans (IEPs) for students with persistent and severe learning difficulties (EDB, 2014). The student support teams of schools must plan, implement, and review support services for students with SEN. The teams work with professionals and parents must decide on the need to formulate IEPs that cover the following:

'Measurable learning targets, specific teaching strategies, accommodations required, success criteria, and review timetable, etc. Expectations of parents, student, and school as well as views of professionals are taken into account in the course of developing the IEPs, which can help students improve academically and/or behaviourally and develop their potential ... A school is required to invite parents to meetings for reviewing the effectiveness of an IEP at least twice per year' (EDB, 2014).

The focus of IEPs may include behavioural/social skills, or basic language and mathematics learning. It can also take the form of individual behavior management plans to help students with autism spectrum disorders or attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorders. It can also take the form of IEPs that focus on academic subjects. The contents of IEPs should be derived from the syllabus of the regular class with differentiated activities and teaching materials, which provide alternatives for students with special

educational needs (EDB, 2010).

EDB (2017) provided schools with a SEN coordinator responsible for leading the student support team in assisting the school principal and the vice-principal(s) in planning, coordinating, and implementing the whole school approach to inclusive education. This policy aims to cultivate an inclusive school culture and increase the effectiveness of the support given to students with SEN.

Despite the comprehensive policy framework set out by the Government, Hong Kong teachers face difficulties with regard to inclusive education in practice. For example, specialists, such as educational psychologists typically need to serve several schools at the same time, and the allocated support for each school is therefore often inadequate. This is also partly due to a limited supply of such professionals given a strict annual quota of admission to the corresponding professional training programs imposed by Government (e.g. educational psychologists, speech and hearing therapists, etc.). Moreover, the large class size in Hong Kong schools compared with other advanced systems also hindered the feasibility and effectiveness of teaching strategies. Finally, the level of home-school interaction and co-operation is inadequate because of the relatively conservative culture of the Chinese population.

The circumstances of inclusive education in primary and secondary schools in Hong Kong are notably different because of the competitive nature of the educational system. Given that government funding depends mostly on the number of students enrolled, good academic performance in public examinations (which take place towards the end of secondary schooling) is more important to secondary schools than to primary schools for attracting students. Primary schools serve as a screening procedure for secondary schools. The child probably requires more attention if behavioural issues or learning difficulties in a student with SEN persist upon graduation from primary schools. Thus, secondary schools tend to be highly selective of students with SEN and are generally less motivated to admit more of them.

1.2. Teacher professional development towards inclusive education

Waitoller and Artiles (2013) reviewed studies that have consistently emphasised the importance of a well-equipped and capable teaching staff to the smooth functioning of inclusive education. Leko et al. (2014) emphasised teachers' professional development as a significant factor in the success of inclusive education. They argued that teachers' perception of their professional development was associated with their competencies to manage learners with diverse learning needs under inclusive settings. Professional development helps teachers learn of the concept of inclusive education and support the implementation process. Therefore, effective training regarding inclusive teaching practices for pre-service and in-service teachers is essential to the success of constructing an inclusive environment (Lindsay, 2007; Pivik, McComas, & Laflamme, 2002). To facilitate improvements in teachers' capability in this regard, steps have been taken by policymakers to expand the proportion of teachers equipped with specific training in teaching children with SEN. For example, the percentage of teachers equipped with related training and obtained undergraduate qualifications or above in China has increased from 7.94% in 2001 to 49.61% in 2011 (Wang & Mu, 2014). Similar substantial increases can be observed in other countries (Srivastava, de Boer, & Pijl, 2015). The Education Bureau in Hong Kong set the target of inclusive teacher training for each ordinary school in the public sector to be accomplished by the end of school year 2019/20, as follows. Within each school, (1) a minimum of 15%–25% of teachers are required to complete a one-week basic course in inclusion, (2) a minimum of six to nine teachers are required to complete a three-week advanced course for SENs, and (3) a minimum of six to nine

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