

Original Paper

Lifelong Inclusive Education Service System in the Context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

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Abstract

Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which is issued by the United Nations in 2015, put forward 17 goals for sustainable development to promote worldwide peace and freedom. Among the 17 goals, one goes to the education vision, stating that “Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”. This goal further and clearly describes the features of the future education: lifelong, inclusive, fair and high-quality. To make the dream true, every country should rethink the present education service and make reforms based on the national situation. In this context, this paper discusses the direction, construction, objects and layout of a lifelong inclusive education service suitable for present China’s national conditions, in hope of contributing Chinese wisdom to the “Community of shared future for mankind”. It is suggested in this paper that we should give priority to the construction and perfection of the macroscopic system and operating mechanisms for the lifelong inclusive education service in consideration of input and output efficiency; that we should update our mind and think of the education from a new perspective, that is, regard the lifelong inclusive education service as part of public service for all the people; that we should provide suitable education service for all students, regardless of age, race, disability, gender and wealth; that we should design and implement the educational projects reasonably and scientifically in order to better realize the goal.

Keywords

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, lifelong inclusive education service system, Shanghai practice

In 2015, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was discussed and adopted at the UN Development Summit. It is a milestone for the whole world, pointing out the direction for the

development of the future human society. As it states, we human beings should make efforts to end absolute poverty and inequality, to deal with climate change, to control environmental pollution and increasingly serious ecological deterioration, and to promote social progress and sustainable economic development. *The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* establishes a sustainable development concept of the trinity of economic development, social progress and environmental improvement, clearly proposing to give everyone equal opportunities, to eliminate the gender gap in education, and to ensure access to education and vocational training for persons at disadvantage, such as persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and vulnerable children.

In the same year, the 38th General Conference of UNESCO formally reviewed and passed the “*Education 2030 Framework for Action*”, which provided guidelines for countries to implement the “*Education 2030*” agenda. It called on all stakeholders to take action towards the new global education goals, and provided the global, regional and national approaches to ensure equal educational opportunities for all.

Meanwhile, “*Central Committee of The communist Party of China: Recommendations For the 13th Five-year Plan for Economic and Social Development*” states that the focus of education development in the next five years is to improve the quality of education and to promote education equity. President Xi Jinping clearly put forward the idea and development strategy called “*Community of shared future for mankind*”, further strengthening the global cooperation. This idea argued for an interdependent global governance system, and suggested that China should share its practices and suggestions with the all world, letting the world understand China, and letting China communicates with the world. Only in this way can we enhance understanding, cooperation, tolerance, and common development among countries around the world, thus build a community of shared future for mankind, and jointly build a better human society. As to the field of special education, China has made many efforts and also got some successful experience, which shows Chinese thinking and wisdom.

In the context of *the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, this article explains the development direction, system construction, target locking, and project layout of inclusive education service, and discusses the construction of a lifelong inclusive education service system. We wish to share Chinese practice and contributes Chinese wisdom and Chinese solutions to “Ensuring inclusive and fair quality education so that everyone can have opportunities for lifelong learning”.

1. The Guidance and Orientation of The Development of Inclusive Education Services is Conducive to The Greater Effectiveness of Resource Input and Use

The 2015 joint report of the UN Council and the European Commission on Education-Training Cooperation New Priorities highlighted the importance of cost-effectiveness in the implementation of EFA, stating: “Sustainable investment, performance and efficiency in education and training systems are key priorities and recommend that Member States use evidence-based decision-making to monitor policy and design reforms to more effectively provide quality education”.

Existing empirical studies show that the effectiveness of inclusive education depends on: policymakers' recognition and commitment to inclusive education, the ability of schools to incorporate student diversity into the school system, a supportive environment for teachers, students, and parents, and the elimination of student participation obstacles to the learning process. So the priority for the growth and development of inclusive education in China goes to formulating policy guarantees at the macro level, constructing a lifelong inclusive education service system, exploring to form a set of practical operating mechanisms, creating a school integrated culture atmosphere, and creating a supportive environment for students with special education needs. It is conducive to the greater effectiveness of resource input and use.

Starting from the core idea of "for the lifelong development of each student", based on the context of the education scene, Changning District in Shanghai formulated a strategy to prioritize the construction of a service system, strengthen the top-level design of special education, focus on elementary education, take interdisciplinary intervention, and advance with projects. This extends both ends of special education, building a lifelong inclusive education support system, providing support and transition services for individuals with special needs in preschool, school, and post-school period. Now, we have realized the transformation from "special education family" to "integration of general and special education" under the realistic situation of dual track system. In 2019 alone, Changning District carried out 64 service projects and held 1760 activities by the extremely limited financial funds, supporting more than 22400 beneficiaries and causing a wide influence both home and abroad.

The practical experience of Changning District shows that it's critical to give priority to building a lifelong inclusive education service system and extend education support and services access to more students in need. Faced the present China situation of the vast size, large population, vast territory, great difference, late development of education modernization, it's an effective path to reduce the cost of education per capita and achieve "Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" in the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*.

2. The Establishment and Operation of the Inclusive Education Support System Is Conducive to the Improvement of the Government Education Public Service System

The general education goal of the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* points out to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. In the report *Rethinking Education: A Change to the Idea of "Global Common Interests"* published by UNESCO, it is clearly stated that "sustainable development" is the core concern of contemporary society. Harmonious symbiosis is the core of sustainable development. Sustainable development not only pursues the sustainable development of people and nature, but also the sustainable development of people and people, society and society. For the sustainable development of mankind and the harmonious coexistence of mankind, UNESCO proposes to reaffirm the humanistic approach, to make education based on humanity, respect for life and human dignity, equal rights, social justice, cultural

diversity, and promote international solidarity and to bear joint responsibility for an innovative and sustainable future development. It is suggested that the harmonious coexistence of human and nature be promoted by humanistic education promote in order to build a better future for human society.

It is critical to think of how to build a public education service system to achieve the goals of *the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. Guided by the goals of *the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* and the spirit of the Fourth Plenary Session of the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, special education in China can make a difference at the intersection of EFA and lifelong education, and do a good job in lifelong education for the disabled to realize the “construction of a lifelong education serve system for all”. At present, special education legislation in the United States provides related services for persons with disabilities aged from 0 to 21. After the age of 21, the civil welfare department of the U.S. A government will take the responsibility. It means that the goal of lifelong learning has not yet been achieved in the field of education. This offers valuable opportunities for China to be the first to build a lifelong public education service system.

In accordance with international education trends, national education policy requirements and the career development needs of individuals with disability, it may take the leadership in the field of the public education serve system around the world by building a lifelong inclusive education service system, implementing inclusive education programs for students with special needs, letting the public service benefit individuals of all ages. The special education schools in China cooperate closely with the Disabled Persons’ Federation Department, transformed from traditional special education schools into new special education schools, adding direct services of rehabilitation training for preschool special children and families as well as indirect services for family education guidance, increasing education support services for individuals over the age of 21, such as cultural literacy, vocational training. All these approaches provide the possibility of improving the public education service system and achieving the goal of lifelong learning for everyone.

In China, besides fully playing the inclusive education support function, special education schools expand the functions of new special education schools by the exploration of setting up experimental schools under special education guidance centers. While serving the students of this school, it also provides the inclusive education for all the children in the region and supports lifelong learning for people with disabilities. The construction and operation of the inclusive education service system requires the development, integration, and allocation of multidisciplinary resources, professional resources, and social resources. At present, special education schools have formed a working basis for integrating resources such as medicine, education and rehabilitation, providing guarantees for better special education and forming a lifelong inclusive education service system. By Strengthening cooperation with the China Disabled Persons’ Federation, making use of the policies, funds and other resources of special education schools and Federation of Disabled Persons, meeting the service needs of infants, children, adults, and the elderly with disabilities, and developing projects, special education schools are changing into lifelong learning support service system for individuals with disabilities.

Early intervention services are extended through medical consultations for infants and young children with special needs. Services for adults with disabilities are extended through organizing student clubs and interest groups. Services for the elderly with disabilities are extended through the regular activities of the alumni associations. Inclusive education schools can take advantage of the Young Pioneers and Communist Youth League organizations to offer application opportunities for inclusive education support teams when parents apply for learning in regular class (Note 1). Regular and powerful tour guidance is offered for the teams in order to solve related challenges, such as large class sizes, high academic pressure, heavy workload and so on. In this way, we form a Chinese inclusive education with socialist characteristics.

To ensure inclusive and fair quality education, it is significant to include the education requirements of students with special needs into various types of education documents issued by the government instead of just special education documents. By this means, the principle of equity in education is better embodied through documentation and promulgation. What's more, it is clear that general education is the main subject and field of inclusive education while special education is only the professional support for inclusive education. Special education should be included in the top-level design and planning of the whole education. In other words, special education is not a type of education corresponding to general education, but an integral part of the overall education system. As a result, the goals and requirements of education for the students with special needs should be clearly defined in the general education curriculum standards so as to reflect the overall inclusiveness and flexibility of the curriculum.

Promote the training and storage of teachers for inclusive education. The first is to strengthen the training of teachers for inclusive education in ordinary colleges and universities. Colleges and universities with high-level professionalism of special education can share their courses with newly-established special education ones. So the new ones can organize students to watch and discuss cases to improve the future teachers' inclusive education professional ability. The second is to provide inclusive education courses in ordinary normal education schools to enhance the inclusive education awareness of normal education teachers and improve their inclusive education knowledge and skills. The third is the integration of inclusive education courses into the continuing education of serving teachers. It is convenient for teachers to continuously update the ideas and knowledge and improve the skills of inclusive education according to the needs of education and teaching. The fourth is to include inclusive education courses in principal training and new teacher training. Principals should aware of that students with special needs are education resources instead of burdens and consider the needs of students with special needs from the overall development plan of the school, thus promote the development of inclusive education. Meanwhile, through the training, new teachers can better understand inclusive education, establish awareness of inclusive education, and practice inclusive education. The fifth is to increase the content of inclusive education in the assessment of teacher qualification certificates, so as to promote teachers who are engaged in education to learn inclusive

education knowledge and skills.

3. The Identification and Expansion of Service Objects of Inclusive Education is Conducive to the Promotion of Lifelong Education Practice for All People

Since the 1980s, China has implemented the policy of “learning in regular class”, encouraging children with disabilities who have the ability to receive general education to enter ordinary schools. This is the start of the inclusive education with Chinese characteristics. At present, there are 270,800 students with special needs enrolled in classes in ordinary primary and junior high schools and attached special education classes in China, accounting for 56.60% and 55.06% of the total enrollment in special education and 55.06% of the total number of students. It is very high proportion. However, at this stage, the main targets of inclusive education are children with hearing, vision, intellectual, physical and mental disabilities, and they must meet certain standards. A large number of students cannot learn in regular class, including the above five categories of children with disabilities who do not meet the current criteria for application, other types of children with disabilities, and children with disabilities in the wider sense (such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, emotional and behavioral disorders, speech and language disorders, learning disabilities, gifted children, sick children, etc.), have not been provided with appropriate education services and adequate support.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development states: “By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations.” This goal describes two key elements: 1) for all: all children can have and enjoy education services; 2) include all: all children should have equal access to education services. In response to the two key elements, China’s inclusive education must further explore the qualification standards for inclusive education services, expand the service targets, and promote the establishment of lifelong inclusive education for all.

By constructing a lifelong inclusive education service system, Changning District provides inclusive education service support for students learning in regular class in the region. Meanwhile, all kindergartens, ordinary primary and secondary schools, vocational schools are encouraged to pay attention to, discover, and refer to students with various special needs. In addition, it provides multidisciplinary assessment and targeted intervention services for children who do not receive the due attention as well as relevant consulting, guidance and training services for teachers and parents through various programs and external service courses. Through years of practice, Changning District has expanded the service targets of inclusive education to all children with special needs, including gifted children, and summarized and formed a set of effective support experiences. That is, we can use the “group-kind- individual” strategy to support these children and their parents, teachers, and heads of campus (see picture below), in order to respond to each student’ lifelong learning needs.

In addition, with the continuous deepening of the connotation of inclusive education, China should also

take minority education and the education of migrant children as part of inclusive education in order to achieve the general education goals set forth in *the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, so as to contribute Chinese wisdom to the world's lifelong inclusive education.

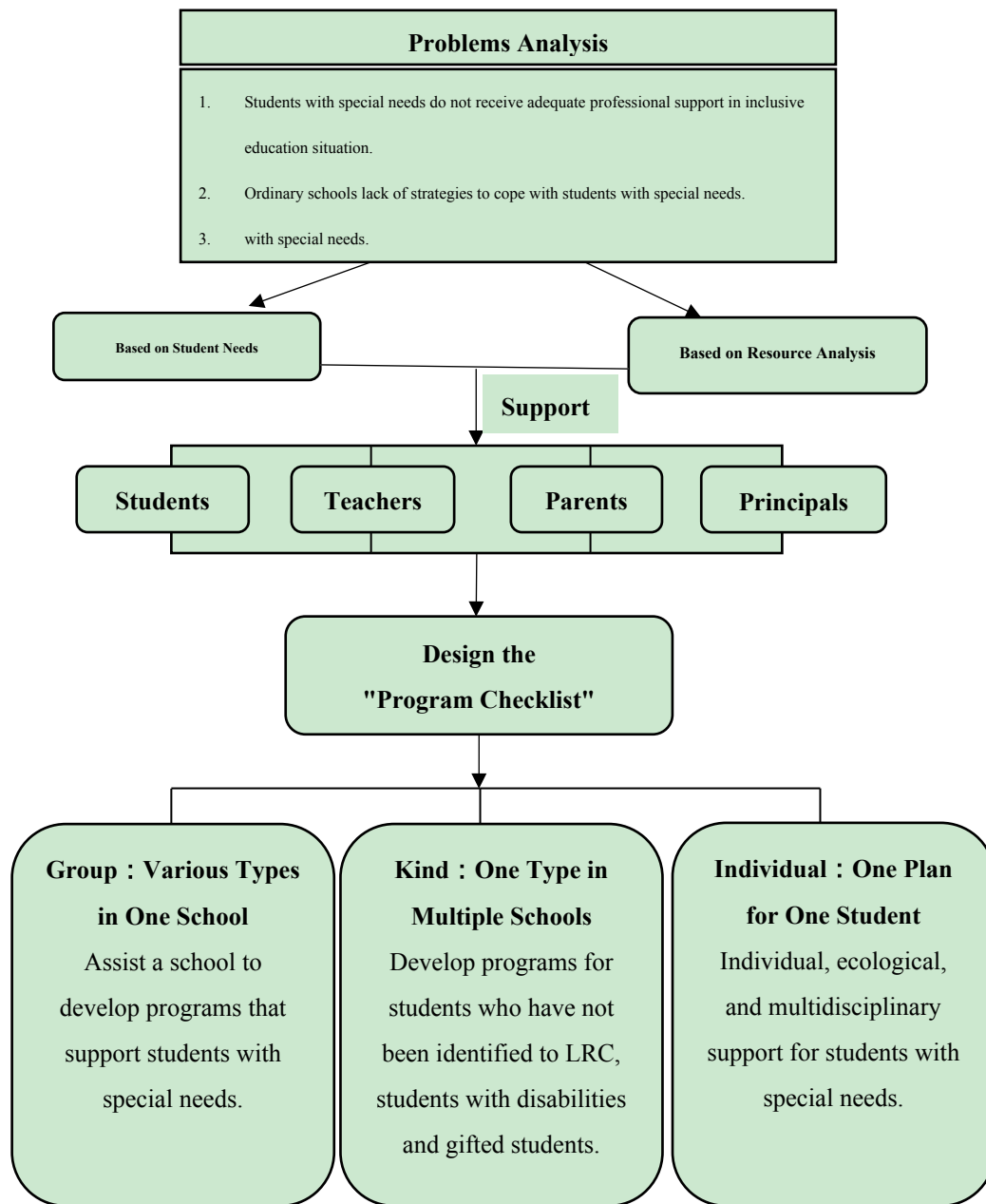


Figure 1. “Group-Kind-Individual” Support Framework in Changning District

4. The Layout and Superposition of Inclusive Education Service Programs Is Conducive to Promoting the Practical Transformation of 2030 Education Goals

The most important value of education is to influence a field, causing a structural change in a system, and a substantive reform. The traditional school system arises from the need for mode of production in

the era of great industrialization. What it considers is the group and how to obtain the basic abilities necessary for production with the highest efficiency, regardless of individual needs. The students in the classroom learn the same knowledge, one-third of whom may already understand while another one-third understand after the teacher explanation, or the final one-third may not understand after the class. Future education must change to meet the learning needs of each student. It is the core of future education for ordinary schools to actively respond to the learning needs of each student and carry out personalized teaching according to the different learning styles and characteristics of each student. Future learning is program-based learning. The effect of program-based learning further exceeds the traditional classroom learning, stimulating students "autonomous learning and tapping students" potential. School education and social resources are now split, not integrated. Future education promotes ubiquitous learning, and teachers' work focuses more on emotional communication, companionship, guidance, and personalized development. Transform traditional schools, make schools into children's homes, senior universities, and school resources. The school resource is shared and open. Each school can become a comprehensive, distinctive, and personalized future learning center.

Based on the future school reforms and the realization of inclusive, fair and high-quality education, it is even more necessary for the systematic inclusive education service programs to be promoted and implemented effectively. The development and implementation of lifelong inclusive education service programs need to be strategically designed at the macro level for top-level design, develop programs in key areas, and rationally lay out key programs in each key area to support the extension of inclusive education to lifelong education. For example, closely linked to the "Everyone has access to life-long learning opportunities" in the general education goals of *the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, Changning District designs, develops, implements programs in early education, preschool education, compulsory education, career education, higher education, career education, adult education and elderly education, constantly improving the lifelong inclusive education service system from 0-3 years old to the elderly, letting everyone enjoy lifelong learning opportunities.

In terms of rational layout, we need to find key areas and find key programs in key areas. For example: In the process of constructing a lifelong inclusive education service system from 0-3 years old to the elderly, based on the development and implementation of more mature programs in the compulsory education stage, the service extends to two ends. Thinking about three key points in early intervention at the age of 0-3, supporting for adults with intellectual disabilities, and supporting for the elderly with disabilities, Changning District use existing resources in the region to develop new service programs, and continuously enrich and improve the education service system. In the field of early intervention for children aged 0-3, Changning District provides professional support and guidance for families of special infants through intervention training and parent counseling for parents of special infants and young children; by linking high-quality medical resources of children's hospitals, carries out free public consultation services offered by famous doctors, solving the practical confusion from parents and teachers; by inviting experienced teachers in special education schools to carry out inclusive

education advocacy activities to strengthen the family education guidance for children with special needs; through cooperation with preschool inclusive education centers, provides respite services for parents of children with special needs, easing the pressure on parents. In the field of supporting adults with intelligence disabilities, by integrating existing vocational education resources in special education schools, Changning District provides vocational training and cultural literacy education for adults with disabilities; enriches leisure life for those graduated through open community activities and interest groups. In the field of supporting the elderly with disabilities, the services are provided through the medical and health service program for the elderly with disabilities and the parent-child script play program. By these means, Changning District has offered lifelong learning for groups with special needs.

In terms of program expansion, the program is continuously enriched through strategies such as program superimposition and new demand satisfaction. Finally, a rich lifelong inclusive education service system is formed. For example, in response to the great pressure of parents of students with special needs, Changning District organizes group psychological salons for parents. Afterwards, online micro-lessons and one-to-one psychological counseling are developed according to parents' new needs. During program development and implementation, Changning District makes full use of the accumulated resources and actively mobilizes expandable resources in and around the region. According to the newly generated requirements during program implementation, new projects are developed and extended based on the existing work. As a result, the supported programs develop from few to many, from simple to refined, and are continuously enriched. In this way, the lifelong inclusive education service system is continuously improved, in order to achieve the general education goals of *the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*: "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all."

The purpose of education is to fully develop the potential of students. Education is growth. Through education, everyone's nature and innate abilities are developed in a healthy way. In the context of education globalization, it calls on every educators to initiatively think how can Chinese education move towards a fairer and higher-quality direction, how to actively participate in global education governance, how to put forward Chinese ideas, Chinese solutions and Chinese expressions. It also calls on every educators to make efforts to explore and practice to promote Chinese education and maintain the peace and sustainable development of the community with a shared future for mankind. We should work hard to make contributions to the 2030 educational goals.

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Note

Note 1. Learning in regular class is a Chinese concept of inclusive education.