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Targeting Higher Quality: Early Childhood Inclusive Education Practice in China

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PART ONE
BACKGROUND



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Background

MOE of China and UNICEF Initiative

Advancing Inclusive Education in China: Enhancing Teachers' Professional Competencies 2021-2025

In 2022, the Action Plan for the Development and Enhancement of Special Education during the Fourteenth Five-Year Plan Period, proposed the goal of “appropriate inclusion.” (General Office of the State Council, 2022).

In 2024, Preschool Education Law of the People's Republic of China in 2024 legally clarified the responsibility to ensure equitable access to universal preschool education for children with special needs (State Council, 2024).

More young children are able to receive high-quality and inclusive education within child-friendly environments.

Impact

More preservice early childhood education students and kindergarten teachers acquire effective competencies in early childhood inclusive education.

More local governments establish plans and enhance their capacity for implementing early childhood inclusive education in kindergartens.

Public awareness and acceptance of early childhood inclusive education and children with special needs continue to increase.

Outcomes

Launch of early childhood inclusive education courses.

Kindergarten principals and other administrators, as well as educational administrative officials, possess the capability to implement and advance early childhood inclusive education.

The early childhood inclusive education has been established in the pilot kindergartens.

Promoting the establishment of inclusive education models across regions

Key information regarding inclusive education and the awareness and acceptance of children with special needs has been developed and disseminated.

Outputs

Pilot implementation of Early Childhood Inclusive Education courses in nine normal universities.

Provision of professional training and practice-based guidance for kindergarten teachers.

Policy dialogues and experience-sharing activities among principals and educational administrators regarding inclusive practices.

Development of regional teaching-research systems

The organization promotes advocacy efforts regarding policies that inclusive education with the optimal timing for implementing such measures.

Publication of key information on the values and best practices of inclusive education.

Activities

Development and digitalization of foundational and advanced curriculum modules for Early Childhood Inclusive Education.

Development of training resources for principals, educational administrators, parents, and other stakeholders.

Provision of accessible facilities, learning materials, and toys based on universal design principles.

Development of capacity building for regional core teams.

Introduction of international experiences and capacity building for instructional teams.

Develop inclusive educational training resources tailored for other stakeholders involved in kindergartens.

Research on early childhood inclusive education curriculum development and implementation.

Investigation of the current status and needs of early childhood inclusive education.

Development and application of quality assessment tools for early childhood inclusive education.

Project Organizational Structure and Division of Responsibilities

1.Ministry of Education and UNICEF: Overall project planning, management, and monitoring and evaluation (UNICEF provides project funding and technical support)

2.Inclusive Education Research Institute, East China Normal University: Formulation of project implementation plans, establishment of project teams, overall technical support, implementation of national-level activities, and organization of project monitoring and evaluation

3.Pilot higher education institutions: Collaborative development of preschool inclusive education curricula, integration of pre-service courses into training programs, cultivation of teachers competent in preschool inclusive education, and guidance and support for project implementation in pilot districts within respective provinces

4.Pilot provincial and district education administrative departments: Supervision and participation in formulating local project implementation plans, advancement of regional preschool inclusive education policy reform, and support for local project implementation

5.Pilot district core teams: Formulation and implementation of district work plans, enhancement of preschool inclusive education literacy, conduct of regional teaching and research activities, and advancement of sustainable mechanisms for preschool inclusive education

6.Project kindergartens: Participation in in-service teacher training, engagement in project-organized experience-sharing and teaching and research activities, inter-kindergarten exchange, establishment of kindergarten-level preschool inclusive education teaching and research groups, and enhancement of kindergarten capacity and practice in preschool inclusive education



Establishing Three Core Teams

Kindergarten: A working group is composed of the principal, the head of childcare and education services, and teachers from inclusive classes.

Pilot Area: A regional core team comprising education administrators, key personnel from model kindergartens, and relevant regional experts.

Universities in the pilot area: National-level experts and instructors of the course "Early Childhood Inclusive Education".

Table: Basic Information on Early Childhood Inclusive Education Implementation in Each Pilot District

Pilot District	Number of Participating Kindergartens (n)	Number of Other Kindergartens Reached Through Various Forms (n)	Total Number of Children with Special Needs Benefited (n)	Total Number of All Children Benefited (Including Children with and without Special Needs) (n)	Total Number of Families of Children with Special Needs Benefited (households)	Total Number of Teachers Participating in Inclusive Education Practice During the Project Period (n)
Haidian	6	99	2818	15559	2818	1904
Meixian	5	13	62	4938	68	3500
Yanta	5	151	126	20493	126	8145
Guancheng	5	85	139	18721	138	709
Zhumadian	6	20	81	2842	85	139
Qingdao	5	60	144	41729	144	406
Linyi	5	502	1327	27420	1327	3746
Total	37	930	4697	131702	4706	18549

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PART TWO

ROADMAP



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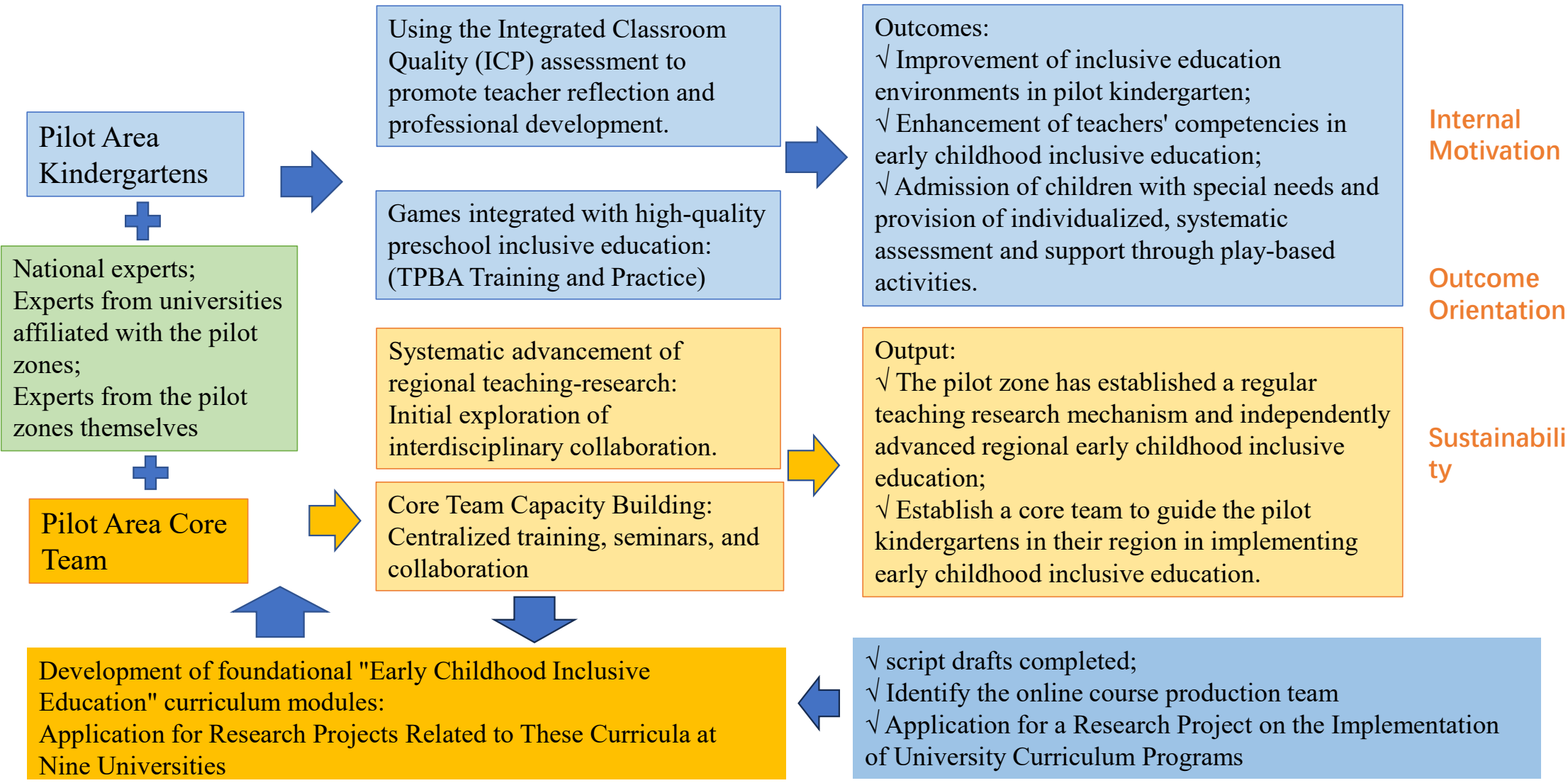
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➤ List of National-Level Project Activities

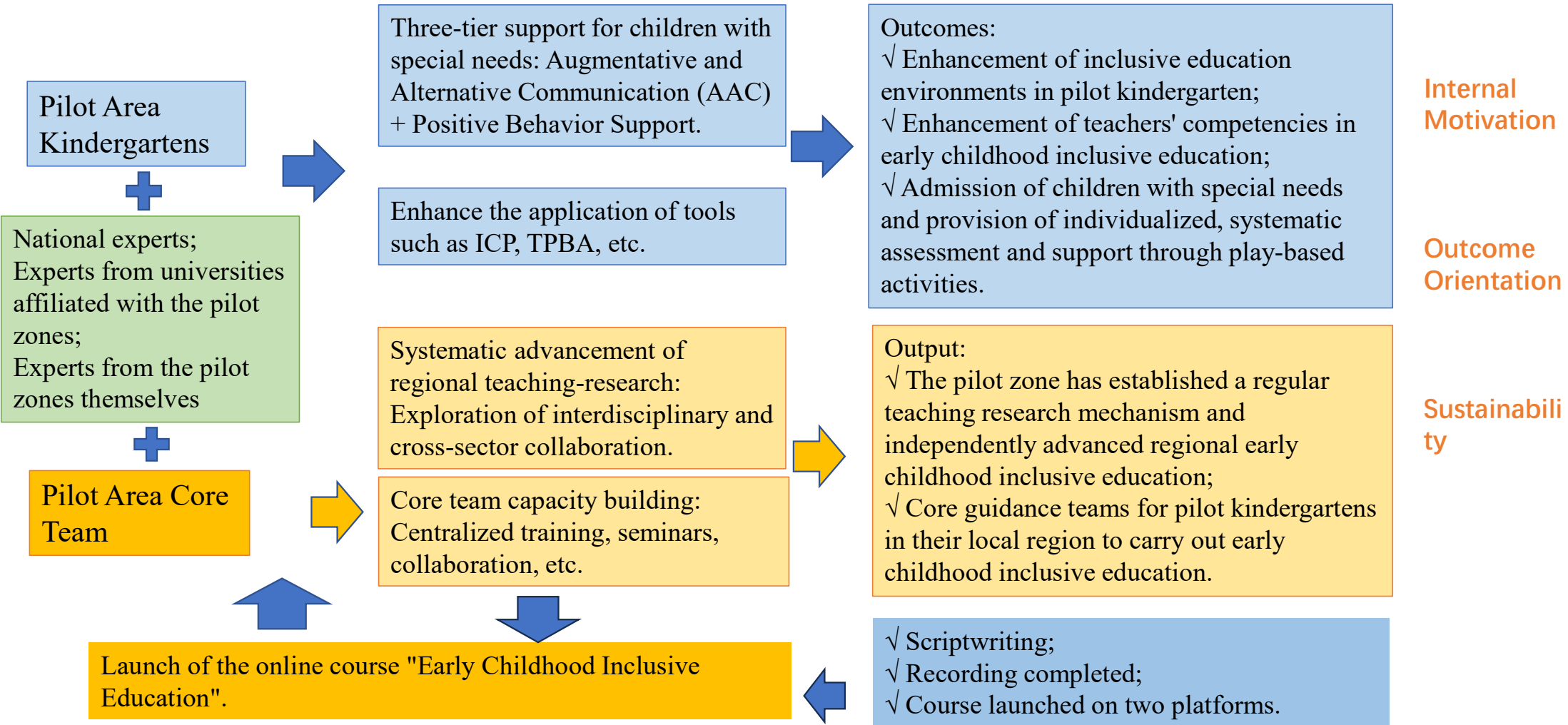
Table 1: Online Training on Innovative Concepts and Exemplary Practices (2022)

number	Lecturer	Institution	theme
1	Shuqin Liu	Qingdao Xingfu Zhijia Kindergarten	Family–School Communication and Collaboration Practices
2	Huichao Xie	Nanyang Technological University, Singapore	Family–School Communication and Collaboration
3	Ling Lü	Peking University Medical School Kindergarten	Designing and Implementing Supportive Play for Children with Autism
4	Peifang Wu	National Taichung University of Education	Application of Positive Behavior Support in Inclusive Settings
5	Toby Long	Georgetown University	Supporting Young Children's Learning: The Importance of Daily Routines
6	Tiantian Liang	Henan Qisehua Welfare Kindergarten	Supporting Children with Special Needs in Daily Activities
7	Jingjing Huang	Beijing Modern Ruizhi Inclusive Kindergarten	Enhancing Social Interaction in Children with Autism through Embedded Instruction
8	Lim Chih Ing	University of North Carolina	Universal Design for Learning to Meet Diverse Educational Needs in Early Childhood Education
9	Xiuhua Han	Shanghai Qiying Kindergarten	Building an Inclusive Culture that Nurtures Every Child
10	Toni Linder	University of Denver	Principles and Inclusive Strategies for Promoting Play

Key Priorities and Implementation Mechanisms in 2024



Key Priorities and Implementation Mechanisms in 2025



➤ Regional Characteristic Activities – Linyi

1. Explored a new pathway for empowering inclusive education through child-initiated play.



Believing that every child is a capable and active learner, and building on child-initiated play, kindergartens provide appropriate play environments and materials, continuously observe and interpret children, improve the quality of teacher-child interactions, provide individualized support for each child, and continuously optimize the early childhood inclusive education ecology.

➤ Regional Characteristic Activities – Linyi

2. Established a multi-tiered implementation system of "pilot-led + follow-along promotion + full coverage."

Local expert teams were cultivated, and cross-sector collaborative implementation mechanisms were established. Focusing on the core needs of kindergartens for inclusive education, a tiered implementation system of "pilot-led kindergartens – follow-along kindergartens for promotion – full coverage" was established. This promoted inclusive education from "point-based breakthroughs" to "area-based coverage," thereby improving the overall quality of kindergarten care and education, as well as teachers' professional competencies in inclusive education across the city.



➤ Regional Characteristic Activities –Guancheng

1. "Kindergarten-to-Primary School Transition" Practice for Children with Special Needs

A series of seminars were conducted on the "kindergarten-to-primary school transition" practice in inclusive education. These seminars aimed to gain an in-depth understanding of the concerns and needs of children with special needs across different domains during the transition process, explore solutions to common problems, and, by extracting effective experiences from the transition process, provide a valid basis for policy-making and transition practices.



The district formed a teaching-research community focused on transition issues, consisting of personnel involved in transition research, such as inclusive education pilot kindergartens and schools, inclusive education experts, and parents. This community collectively conducted integrated joint teaching-research and training activities centered on transition challenges.

➤ Regional Characteristic Activities –Guancheng

2. Establishing Multi-Sector Collaboration

A multi-sector collaborative mechanism was established, led by the Education Bureau and involving local Disability Federations, Health Commissions, Women's Federations, Civil Affairs Bureaus, and other departments. Through practical dialogue, professional barriers were broken down and practical challenges were addressed. A regional support network and a complete pathway from early identification, assessment, and referral to kindergarten placement were established, forming a regional "education-rehabilitation-medicine collaboration" service model for early childhood inclusive education.



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PART THREE OUTCOMES



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Using methods such as questionnaire surveys, on-site observations, video analysis in natural activities, in-depth interviews, and textual analysis, a systematic and in-depth outcome evaluation was conducted on the following aspects across 37 project pilot kindergartens in seven pilot districts: **the progress of early childhood inclusive education**, the quality of educational practices and activities, **teacher professional growth and empowerment**, child development and social inclusion, and regional promotion and interdisciplinary collaboration.

The evaluation team included university researchers, local kindergarten administrators and teachers, as well as cross-regional kindergarten administrators and teachers.

The project directly trained and involved 18,549 teacher participants in inclusive education practices, reaching 131,702 beneficiary children (including 4,697 children with special needs).

The online course resource "Early Childhood Inclusive Education" received over 6.66 million course enrollments. Nine higher education institutions offered a total of 34 rounds of inclusive education courses, with 2,375 students enrolling.

- Typical Before-and-After Photos of Kindergarten Environmental Changes

Inclusive Support • Accessibility of Physical Space

The 13th Kindergarten of Yanta District, Xi'an City, Shanxi Province



Outdoor accessible pathways



Stair handrails



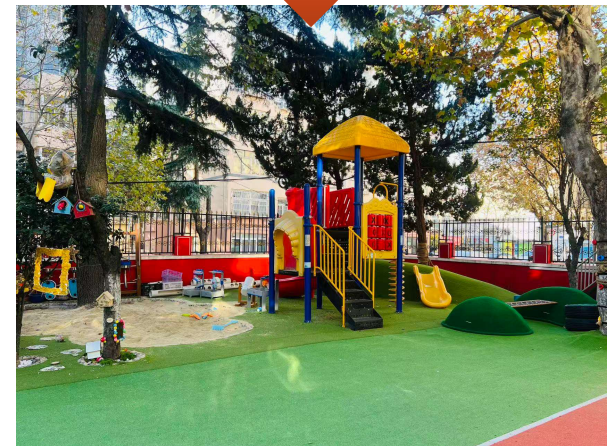
Toilet facilities

- Typical Before-and-After Photos of Kindergarten Environmental Changes

Jiangxi Road Kindergarten, Shinan District, Qingdao City,
Shandong Province

Accessible Play Space

The renovated sandpit added soft mats, and the gently sloped slide lowered the physical barrier for participation, meeting the motor needs of all children and providing a safe space for exploration. Before renovation, the sandpit was an isolated space with limited play options. After renovation, the open spatial layout allowed children of different abilities to interact naturally, helping children in inclusive settings participate together and build peer connections.



• Typical Before-and-After Photos of Kindergarten Environmental Changes

**Inclusive Support •
Inclusiveness and Richness of the Environment:**

Central Kindergarten of Guancheng Hui District,
Zhengzhou City, Henan Province

A sandpit and a water feature were added. A "Warm Reading Nook" was set up in the stairwell. Sensory integration equipment was added to the outdoor play facilities, effectively meeting the individualized developmental needs of diverse children.



• Typical Before-and-After Photos of Kindergarten Environmental Changes

Inclusive Support • Appropriateness of Materials (Picture Books, Toys, etc.):

Huaxi Road Kindergarten, Guancheng Hui District, Zhengzhou City, Henan Province

A variety of manipulative materials and inclusive picture books were added, including foam fingertip sensory toys, popular tube sensory toys, hand exercise putty, rainbow cubes, etc. Additionally, percussion instruments such as frog rasps, finger cymbals, maracas, and hand bells were added to the performance area. These materials provide multi-dimensional sensory stimulation for children. Furthermore, professional books on inclusive education were added to the teacher's lending library, providing study references for teachers to enhance their professional competencies.



- Typical Before-and-After Photos of Kindergarten Environmental Changes
Inclusive Support • Appropriateness of Materials (Picture Books, Toys, etc.):

Huaiya Town Central Kindergarten, Baoji City, Shaanxi Province



Previously, picture book stories did not address inclusive education.



Now, every classroom's book corner has inclusive books.

• Typical Before-and-After Photos of Kindergarten Environmental Changes

Inclusive Support • Individualized Supports such as Visual Cues:

Liuyi Kindergarten, Haidian District, Beijing



- Classroom water dispenser. (Zaozao often forgot to drink during group drinking time, wandered off, did not like drinking water, and was unclear about the appropriate amount of water to drink.)

- Visual cards with text and icons ("too little," "just right," "too much") were placed on the water dispenser to remind children of the appropriate amount of water to drink.
- Based on Zaozao's interest in recognizing words, the text "Zaozao, come drink water" was placed on the water dispenser to prompt the child to drink.

• Typical Before-and-After Photos of Kindergarten Environmental Changes

Linyi No.1 Experimental Kindergarten, Lanshan District, Linyi City, Shandong Province



- Before the change: During outdoor activity preparation, children with special needs often appeared at a loss, wandering between the classroom and the hallway. Teachers provided verbal reminders, but the effect was limited.
- After the change: Teachers visually presented the outdoor activity preparation steps, allowing children with special needs to follow the visual cues to get ready.

• **Teacher Professional Growth and Empowerment**

(I) Findings from Quantitative Data Analysis – **Pre-service** Teachers' Knowledge, Attitudes, and Professional Development in Inclusive Education

- Implementation of the "Early Childhood Inclusive Education" Course at Nine Higher Education Institutions
- Longitudinal Study on Pre-service Teachers' Knowledge, Attitudes, and Professional Development in Early Childhood Inclusive Education (2024 & 2025)

(II) Findings from Quantitative Data Analysis – **In-service** Teachers' Knowledge, Attitudes, and Professional Development in Inclusive Education

- Horizontal Evaluation at the Project Completion Phase in 2025
- Growth Trajectory of In-service Kindergarten Teachers' Knowledge, Attitudes, and Professional Development in Early Childhood Inclusive Education (2022 & 2025)

(III) Findings from Qualitative Data Analysis

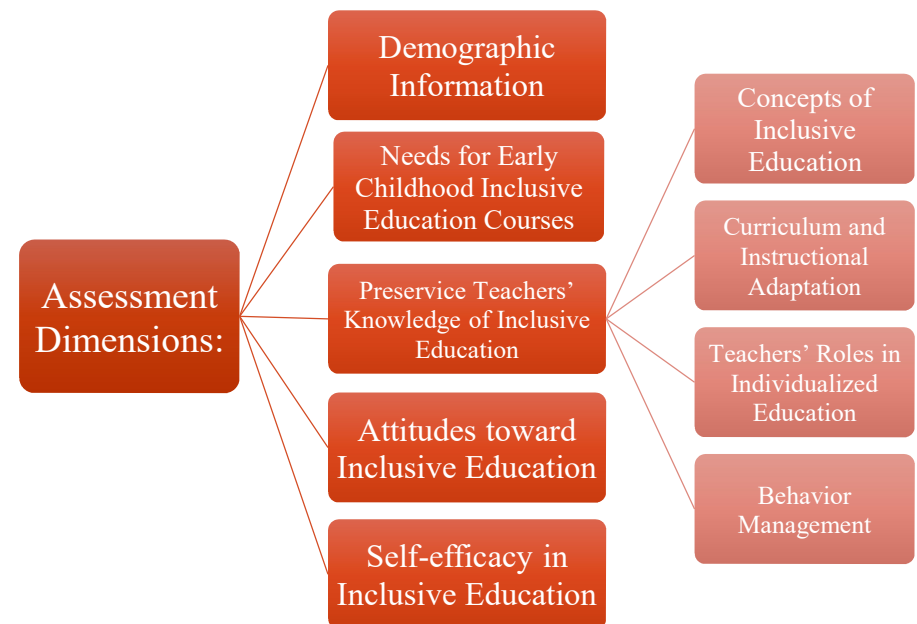
• Teacher Professional Growth and Empowerment

(I) Findings from Quantitative Data Analysis – **Pre-service** Teachers' Knowledge, Attitudes, and Professional Development in Inclusive Education

1. Longitudinal Study Design (2024 & 2025)

- Research instrument:

The "Preschool Teacher Inclusive Education Knowledge Proficiency Assessment Tool" was used. Statistical tests confirmed that the tool had acceptable content validity ($CV < 0.35$), and met the assumptions of unidimensionality and local independence ($KMO = 0.91$, $\chi^2 = 17461.56$, $p < 0.05$; the ratio of the first to second eigenvalue was 3.08).



• Teacher Professional Growth and Empowerment

(I) Findings from Quantitative Data Analysis – **Pre-service** Teachers' Knowledge, Attitudes, and Professional Development in Inclusive Education

2. Longitudinal Study Design (2024 & 2025)

Participant Demographic Information Table

Variable	Category	n	%	Variable	Category	n	%
Gender	Male	15	12.71%	Major	Early Childhood Education	117	99.15%
	Female	103	87.29%		Special Education	1	0.85%
Grade Level	Freshman	0	0.00%	University	East China Normal University	47	39.83%
	Sophomore	6	5.08%		Shanxi Normal University	35	29.66%
	Junior	111	94.07%		Chongqing Normal University	27	22.88%
	Senior	1	0.85%		Quanzhou Normal University	9	7.63%
Experience with Children with Special Needs	Yes	54	45.76%	Have taken related courses on disabilities or special needs	是	48	40.68%
	No	64	54.24%		否	70	59.32%

Teacher Professional Growth and Empowerment

(I) Findings from Quantitative Data Analysis – **Pre-service** Teachers' Knowledge, Attitudes, and Professional Development in Inclusive Education

2. Longitudinal Study Design (2024 & 2025)

- Research participants: Undergraduate students from four higher education institutions (majors in early childhood education and special education).
- Questionnaire collection:
 - A total of 414 pre-test questionnaires (distributed in 2024) and 167 post-test questionnaires (distributed in 2025) were collected.
 - After excluding questionnaires with excessively short completion times (less than 5 minutes), a total of **118** valid matched pre- and post-test questionnaires were obtained.
- Data analysis: Descriptive statistics and difference analyses were conducted using SPSS 27.

Teacher Professional Growth and Empowerment

(I) Findings from Quantitative Data Analysis – **Pre-service** Teachers' Knowledge, Attitudes, and Professional Development in Inclusive Education

2. Longitudinal Study Results (2024 & 2025) – Overall

- A paired-sample t-test was conducted on the total scores of the 2024 and 2025 questionnaires;
- With $T = -5.800$, $p < 0.001$, overall, there was a significant difference in the scores of early childhood inclusive education knowledge, attitudes, etc., among undergraduate students majoring in early childhood education and special education between 2024 and 2025. **The scores in 2025 were significantly higher than those in 2024, indicating that the course significantly improved students' relevant knowledge and attitudes.**

		Results of Paired-Samples t-Test					t	df	Sig.(2-tailed)
		Mean Difference	SD	SE	95% CI				
					Lower	Upper			
Paired Comparison 1	Total score-pre - Total score-post	-10.068	18.857	1.736	-13.506	-6.630	-5.800	117	<.001

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(I) Findings from Quantitative Data Analysis – Pre-service Teachers' Knowledge, Attitudes, and Professional Development in Inclusive Education

3. Longitudinal Study Results (2024 & 2025) – Sub-dimensions

- A paired-sample t-test was used to analyze whether there was a difference in pre-service teachers' mastery of inclusive education knowledge between 2024 and 2025.
- With $T = -2.829$, $p < 0.05$, there was a significant difference in "pre-service teachers' mastery of inclusive education knowledge" among undergraduate students majoring in early childhood education and special education between 2024 and 2025, with scores in 2025 being significantly higher than those in 2024.

		Results of Paired-Samples t-Test					t	df	Sig.(2-tailed)
		Mean Difference	SD	SE	95% CI				
					Lower	Upper			
Paired Comparison 1	Preservice Teachers' Knowledge of Inclusive Education (Pre-Post)	-1.246	4.784	0.440	-2.118	-0.374	-2.829	117	0.006

Teacher Professional Growth and Empowerment

(II) Findings from Quantitative Data Analysis – **In-service** Teachers' Knowledge, Attitudes, and Professional Development in Inclusive Education

1. Research Methods

- Research participants: Kindergarten inclusive education teachers.
- Survey method: Questionnaires were distributed online using the Questionnaire Star platform across seven pilot districts.
- A total of 1,070 questionnaires were collected. After screening out those with excessively short completion times (less than 5 minutes), 1,021 valid questionnaires were obtained.
- Data analysis: Descriptive statistics and difference analyses were conducted using SPSS 27.

Questionnaire completion status by pilot district

Pilot Region	Project Kindergartens	Pilot Kindergartens	Project Kindergartens
Haidian	74	7	81
Guancheng	102	109	211
Zhumadian	148	40	188
Qingdao	80	83	163
Linyi	113	126	239
Yanta	80	8	88
Meixian	30	21	51
Total	627	394	1021

Teacher Professional Growth and Empowerment

(II) Findings from Quantitative Data Analysis – **In-service** Teachers' Knowledge, Attitudes, and Professional Development in Inclusive Education

1. Research Methods

- **Research instrument: The "Preschool Teacher Inclusive Education Knowledge Proficiency Assessment Tool" was used.**

The "Preschool Teacher Inclusive Education Knowledge Proficiency Assessment Tool"



Teacher Professional Growth and Empowerment

(II) Findings from Quantitative Data Analysis – In-service Teachers' Knowledge, Attitudes, and Professional Development in Inclusive Education

2. 2025 Pilot District Project Conclusion Evaluation Results

Demographic Information of Kindergarten Teachers

Variable	Category	n	%	Variable	Category	n	%
Gender	Male	26	2.55	Major	Early Childhood Education	888	86.97
	Female	995	97.45		Arts-related Fields	27	2.64
Educational Background	Junior high school or below	1	0.10		Special Education	17	1.67
	High school/Technical secondary school	36	3.53		Other Fields	89	8.72
Teaching Experience	Associate degree	236	23.11	Experience with Children with Special Needs	In own classroom	629	61.61
	Bachelor's degree	730	71.50		In neighboring classroom	213	20.86
	Master's degree	18	1.76		Heard about only	92	9.01
	1–2 years	128	12.54		Through relatives	13	1.27
	3–4 years	194	19.00	No experience	74	7.25	
	5–10 years	404	39.57	Kindergarten Type	Demonstration Kindergarten	713	69.83
11–15 years	157	15.38	First-level Kindergarten		215	21.06	
More than 16 years	138	13.52	Second-level Kindergarten		60	5.88	
Professional Title	Senior Teacher	17	1.67		Third-level Kindergarten	2	0.20
	First-level Teacher	138	13.52	Not rated	31	3.04	
	Second-level Teacher	492	48.19	Kindergarten Ownership	Public	851	83.35
Third-level Teacher	32	3.13	Government-supported Private		111	10.87	
No Professional Title	342	33.50	Non-government-supported Private		22	2.15	
Variable	Category	n	%		Other	37	3.62

Teacher Professional Growth and Empowerment

(II) Findings from Quantitative Data Analysis – **In-service** Teachers' Knowledge, Attitudes, and Professional Development in Inclusive Education

2. Longitudinal Comparison: 2022 & 2025

Descriptive Statistics

	Haidian		Guancheng		Zhumadian		Qingdao		Linyi		Yanta		Meixian	
	M±SD (pre)	M±SD (post)	M±SD (pre)	M±SD (post)	M±SD (pre)	M±SD (post)	M±SD (pre)	M±SD (post)	M±SD (pre)	M±SD (post)	M±SD (pre)	M±SD (post)	M±SD (pre)	M±SD (post)
Kindergarten Teachers' Knowledge of Inclusive Education	58.31±6.77	58.49±5.83	49.74±7.75	56.47±7.78	51.19±9.93	53.92±7.50	52.09±8.63	56.98±1.04	50.98±7.31	55.92±7.14	28.02±3.20	57.78±8.65	50.32±9.70	52.41±8.69
Attitudes toward Inclusive Education	47.58±6.96	47.19±6.33	42.06±7.73	48.1±7.03	43.04±1.05	44.94±7.89	45.11±9.35	46.34±9.89	43.81±8.01	45.75±8.59	44.95±6.30	46.27±9.78	39.54±7.82	42.41±9.44
Current Needs for Inclusive Education	68.48±8.99	67.9±8.26	60.76±9.79	67.73±8.99	63.41±1.39	65.37±9.05	67.44±1.02	68.11±1.07	64.74±9.22	66.37±9.67	60.18±8.60	67.26±9.11	60.76±8.23	62.75±9.44
Self-efficacy in Inclusive Education	65.4±11.41	64.52±9.14	61.18±1.029	69.52±9.67	64.88±1.093	64.96±9.98	66.29±1.281	68.41±1.272	64.57±9.73	66.87±1.126	60.59±8.56	67.16±1.182	60.32±7.77	62.88±1.025
Number of valid cases (by column)	81	81	211	211	188	118	139	163	263	239	88	88	41	51

- The results showed that, with the exception of Haidian, the average scores of the four items in all pilot districts generally demonstrated a significant increasing trend.
- The "Kindergarten Teachers' Mastery of Inclusive Education Knowledge" item showed the most significant increase.

Teacher Professional Growth and Empowerment

(II) Findings from Quantitative Data Analysis – **In-service** Teachers' Knowledge, Attitudes, and Professional Development in Inclusive Education

3. Longitudinal Comparison: 2022 & 2025

- The Mann-Whitney U test showed that the differences between the pre- and post-test data across the four dimensions were statistically significant ($p < 0.001$), with $|Z|$ values ranging from 6.712 to 14.456, indicating significant differences before and after the training.

	Kindergarten Teachers' Knowledge of Inclusive Education	Attitudes toward Inclusive Education	Current Needs for Inclusive Education	Self-efficacy in Inclusive Education
Mann-Whitney U	325059.000	428171.500	428767.000	430054.500
Wilcoxon W	836625.000	939737.500	940333.000	941620.500
Z	-14.456	-6.758	-6.919	-6.712
Asymptotic Significance (Two-Tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000

a. Grouping variable: group

Teacher Professional Growth and Empowerment

(II) Findings from Quantitative Data Analysis – **In-service** Teachers' Knowledge, Attitudes, and Professional Development in Inclusive Education

3. Longitudinal Comparison: 2022 & 2025

- The rank means of all four dimensions were higher after the training than before, indicating that **the project had a multi-dimensional positive impact on preschool teachers' inclusive education competencies.**
- Among these, the "Kindergarten Teachers' Mastery of Inclusive Education Knowledge" dimension showed the most significant increase, while the "Inclusive Education Self-Efficacy" dimension showed a relatively smaller increase.

秩				
	Group	Group	Group	Group
Kindergarten Teachers' Knowledge of Inclusive Education	Pre	1011	827.52	836625.00
	Post	1021	1203.63	1228903.00
Attitudes toward Inclusive Education	Pre	1011	929.51	939737.50
	Post	1021	1102.64	1125790.50
Current Needs for Inclusive Education	Pre	1011	930.10	940333.00
	Post	1021	1102.05	1125195.00
Self-efficacy in Inclusive Education	Pre	1011	931.38	941620.50
	Post	1021	1100.79	1123907.50

Teacher Professional Growth and Empowerment

(III) Findings from Teacher/Principal Interviews

1. Qualitative Research Design

- **Research method:** This evaluation used formal semi-structured interviews. Through face-to-face communication with principals and teachers, data were collected on their growth and changes, practical challenges, and future expectations after participating in the project, with the aim of obtaining authentic and detailed first-hand information.
- **Research participants:** Based on the demographic information of kindergarten teachers implementing inclusive education in project kindergartens (e.g., gender, age, education level, teaching experience, professional title), an appropriate number of kindergarten teachers were selected as interview participants in each project kindergarten following the principles of comprehensiveness and heterogeneity. In each district, 1-2 principals were selected for interviews based on the nature of the kindergarten and their implementation of inclusive education. Ultimately, a total of **60 kindergarten teachers and 12 principals** were interviewed.
- **Research instrument:** The interview protocol was designed around three core dimensions: gains of principals and teachers, practical challenges, and future support needs. The aim was to use open-ended questions to guide the interviewed principals and teachers in reflecting on their participation experiences in the project, systematically document their changes and growth, while identifying their confusions and challenges during practice, and collecting their authentic needs for future support.

Teacher Professional Growth and Empowerment

(III) Findings from Teacher/Principal Interviews

1 Demographic Information of Interviewed Teachers

Demographic Information of Teachers (N = 60)

Demographic Characteristics		N	%	Demographic Characteristics		N	%
Gender	female	54	90.00	Special Education Allowance	Yes	18	30.00
	male	6	10.00		No	42	70.00
Educational Background	Junior High School or Below	1	1.70	Employment Status	Yes	37	61.70
	Associate Degree	12	20.00		No	23	38.30
	Bachelor's Degree	43	71.70	Teaching Experience	5 years or below	27	45.00
	Master's Degree or Above	4	6.70		6–10 years	18	30.00
Major	Early Childhood Education	41	68.30		11–15 years	5	8.30
	Special Education	2	3.30		More than 16 years	10	16.70
	Other Education-related Majors	9	15.00	Region	Shandong	25	41.70
	Other	8	13.30		Shanxi	18	30.00
Years of Experience Working with Children with Special Needs	5 years or below	43	71.70		Henan	10	16.70
	6–10 years	13	21.70		Beijing	7	11.70
	11–15 years	2	3.30				
	More than 16 years	2	3.30				

Teacher Growth and Empowerment

(III) Findings from Teacher/Principal Interviews

2. Qualitative Data Analysis

- **Data obtained:** The total duration of this evaluation was 1,628.95 minutes (27.15 minutes per session), and a cumulative total of 528,600 Chinese characters of transcribed text were obtained.
- **Data analysis process:** This evaluation used content analysis to analyze the transcribed texts. The processing and analysis of interview data mainly involved two steps:
 - First, reading the original data line by line and word by word to conduct first-level coding;
 - Second, re-reading the texts within the existing category system, continuously reflecting and summarizing during this process to conduct second-level coding, with the aim of extracting higher-level categories.

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Example of Coding Process – Using "Principal Gains" as an Example

First-Level Coding

Through line-by-line and word-by-word open coding of the collected qualitative data on "principal gains," this evaluation obtained a total of 28 initial concepts, which served as the basis for second-level coding.

Table 3. First-Level Coding Table (Partial)

Initial Concept	original statement
Understanding of Inclusion	“Through external learning opportunities, I realized that inclusion is a broad concept...”
	"In reality, it's aimed at solving social problems."
Perspectives on General and Special Education	“What is considered special? In another group, perhaps we ourselves would also be considered special.”
Understanding of Children with Special Needs	“Children with special needs are children as well; every child should be accepted.”

Second-Level Coding

After merging or reorganizing different initial concepts, this evaluation identified a total of 4 main categories.

Table 4. Second-Level Coding Table (Partial)

Main Categories	Categories	Categories Connotation
Conceptual Transformation	Understanding of Inclusion	Enhanced understanding of the nature of inclusive education and children with special needs, shifting from a narrow understanding of inclusion among children toward a broader social perspective
	Perspectives on General and Special Education	
	Understanding of Children with Special Needs	

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3. Project Gains

3.1 Principal Gains

- **Conceptual Elevation:** Upgraded understanding of the essence of inclusive education and children with special needs; from "integration among children" to "solving broader social issues."
- **Knowledge Expansion:** Child development patterns, assessment tools, curricula, etc.
- **Skill Deepening:** Identification of children with special needs, design of support strategies, etc.
- **Management Competence Enhancement:** Project management, resource coordination, team coordination, etc.

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3. Project Gains

3.2 Teacher Gains

- **Educational Concept Renewal:** The essence of inclusive education, understanding of children with special needs, educational values, etc.
- **Professional Knowledge Expansion:** Types of children with special needs and their developmental patterns, assessment tools, etc.
- **Practical Competence Advancement:** Application of assessment tools, problem-solving strategies, home-school collaboration techniques, etc.
- **Enhanced Professional Identity:** "A meaningful career."
- **Changes in Life Attitudes and Parenting Concepts:** Transferring concepts such as "diversity," "acceptance," and "non-labeling" to daily life and family education.

Teacher Growth and Empowerment

(III) Findings from Teacher/Principal Interviews

4. Practical Challenges

4.1 Challenges Faced by Principals

- **Strained Home-Kindergarten Relationships:** Denial from parents of children with special needs; lack of understanding from parents of typically developing children.
- **Weak Teacher Team Building:** Teacher professional growth and team stability.
- **Financial Shortages:** Lack of dedicated funding.
- **Enrollment Difficulties:** The broader context combined with a sharp increase in the proportion of children with special needs, leading parents of typically developing children to "avoid" these kindergartens.
- **Difficulties in Managing Children with Special Needs:** The "zero rejection" policy for children with special needs and subsequent transition issues.

Teacher Growth and Empowerment

(III) Findings from Teacher/Principal Interviews

4. Practical Challenges

4.2 Challenges Faced by Teachers

- **Lack of Teaching Competence:** A negative cycle of "inability to decode – ineffective intervention – zero feedback."
- **Increased Workload:** Additional tasks added due to inclusive education, such as observation, assessment, and home-kindergarten communication.
- **Ineffective Home-Kindergarten Communication:** Denial from parents of children with special needs; rejection from parents of typically developing children.
- **Classroom Management Difficulties:** Safety risks, instructional interruptions, peer conflicts, etc.

Teacher Growth and Empowerment

(III) Findings from Teacher/Principal Interviews

5. Future Support Needs

5.1 Future Support Needs of Principals

- **Establish a multi-sector collaboration mechanism:** Early screening, diagnostic assessment, information sharing, integration of medicine and education, rehabilitation intervention, etc.
- **Professional Resource Support:** Allocate professional personnel resources for inclusive education; systematic training and ongoing professional guidance.
- **Policy and System Improvement:** Clarify implementation standards for inclusive education, division of roles and responsibilities, etc.
- **Financial and Material Guarantees:** Per-student funding, dedicated subsidies, accessible facility construction, etc.
- **Public Advocacy:** Parent education, public opinion guidance, etc.

Teacher Growth and Empowerment

(III) Findings from Teacher/Principal Interviews

5. Future Support Needs

5.2 Future Support Needs of Teachers

- **Professional Development Support**: Direct guidance from professionals or professional institutions; systematic courses and lectures; continuous teaching-research and training, etc.
- **Institutional Support**: Salary and benefits, preferential consideration in awards and evaluations, optimization of relevant assessment methods, etc.
- **Emotional and Psychological Care**: Parental understanding, social recognition, positive public advocacy, kindergartens' attention to teachers' mental health, etc.
- **Resource Guarantees**: Hardware and material resources such as accessible facilities and sensory integration equipment; staffing at the kindergarten level.



**Targeting Higher Quality:
Early Childhood Inclusive Education for Everyone!**



T H A N K Y O U

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