

# The current development and challenges of special education in China

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**Abstract.** China's special education system primarily serves children with physical and mental disabilities and has made significant progress in recent years. These advancements are reflected in the increased number of schools, the growth in student enrollment, the rise in the number of disabled students entering higher education, the enhancement of teacher training and professional standards, and the substantial increase in national funding. However, despite these achievements, several challenges remain, including incomplete legislation, unequal resource distribution, a lack of assessment tools, insufficient special education equipment, inadequate teacher resources, and an underdeveloped management system. These issues arise from the relatively late inception of special education in China, insufficient public awareness, an underdeveloped training system for specialized personnel, uneven regional economic development, overlapping responsibilities among multiple managing departments, and inadequate social participation and support. To further advance the development of special education in China, it is recommended to improve the legislative framework, strengthen legal supervision and enforcement, expand the coverage of educational services, enhance the training of special education professionals, optimize resource allocation, establish a robust management system, and increase social awareness and education to encourage broader societal participation and support for special education.

**Keywords:** special education, students with disabilities, China

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## 1. Introduction

China's educational history is extensive, with the foundations of education emerging as early as the Xia, Shang, and Zhou dynasties. During the Western Zhou period, a preliminary school system was established, primarily utilizing group and individualized teaching methods that emphasized practical education [1]. Although the ancient Chinese educational system was not as refined as the modern one, researchers suggest that a rudimentary form of special education already existed at that time. It is widely acknowledged within the academic community that China is among the earliest countries in the world to implement specific educational measures for individuals with disabilities [2]. During this period, the focus of special education was primarily on individuals who were blind or deaf, and the teaching methods typically employed were one-to-one or one-to-many formats. Despite the absence of a comprehensive educational system and a lack of historical evidence for large-scale institutional education, this early model of personalized education is still considered a significant phase in the history of special education in China.

Special education constitutes a significant component of China's educational system, focusing on the education and development of special populations [3]. Following the issuance of the "Guidelines for Evaluating the Quality of Special Education Schools" by China's Ministry of Education, two explicit standards were established for the management of these schools: enhancing the administration of special schools and improving the management of accessibility facilities [4]. These standards aim to ensure the educational rights of children with special needs, promote the development of scientifically sound school plans, enhance mechanisms for special education, and secure adequate resources for the effective operation of special education initiatives.

The modern development of special education in China, while sharing a common trajectory with Western nations, exhibits distinct differences in its inception and progress. In the United States, special education typically refers to services provided for students with disabilities, as well as those with exceptional talents. This generally includes students with Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD), Intellectual Disabilities (ID), Emotional Disturbances (ED), Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), and Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), along with those who have sensory impairments or physical disabilities, such as

blindness, deafness, traumatic brain injury, cerebral palsy, and muscular dystrophy, among 14 major categories [5]. According to the UNCRPD [6], it also encompasses individuals with long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments that may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others. In contrast, special education in China currently encompasses seven major categories: visual impairment, hearing impairment, physical disability, intellectual disability, speech impairment, mental disability (including autism), and multiple disabilities [7]. Despite these differences in classification, China has made continuous efforts to enhance the accessibility and quality of special education. Since 2017, significant advancements have been achieved in both policy and practice.

The Chinese government has prioritized the development of special education and has increased investment to enhance public services for persons with disabilities in rehabilitation, education, culture, and sports. The second phase of the Special Education Promotion Program (2017-2020) has introduced targeted measures aimed at increasing the enrollment rate in special education, strengthening teacher training, and improving educational conditions. These efforts aim to promote educational equity, enhance the quality of education, and address the needs of students with disabilities. In 2021, the 14th Five-Year Plan for the Protection and Development of Persons with Disabilities was released, marking the beginning of a new stage in the development of comprehensive nursing service systems for persons with disabilities across all provinces and regions [8]. This commitment ensures that children and adolescents with disabilities receive an education tailored to their specific needs, while simultaneously fostering their development, promoting their ability to integrate into society, and equipping them with the skills necessary to benefit from social development. Consequently, this article aims to explore the development and challenges of special education in China, focusing on the current difficulties and proposing suggestions and countermeasures.

## 2. Methodology

The primary aim of this study is to examine the current development status and shortcomings of special education in China, while also proposing countermeasures and suggestions to address these shortcomings. Employing a qualitative research methodology, this study conducts a qualitative analysis and discussion of government data through narration and description. According to Sun & Rong there are five principal types of case research tasks: descriptive research, explanatory research, exploratory research, evaluative research, and illustrative research [9]. Flyvbjerg asserts that the essence of case study research lies in the in-depth exploration of an 'individual unit,' emphasizing the importance of selecting the research object and defining its scope [10]. This research method is adept at capturing rich details and changes in depth. Furthermore, case studies place a particular emphasis on 'development factors,' which pertain to how the case evolves over time, as well as the series of related events and the 'relationship with the environment,' which encompasses background factors. The primary data sources for this study include statistical documents published by the Ministry of Education of China and the China Disabled Persons' Federation. Additionally, relevant educational research articles and reports were utilized. The primary sources were meticulously reviewed and analyzed to formulate conclusions and recommendations.

## 3. The development of special education in China

China, a nation with a long history and a rich cultural heritage, has deeply embedded traditional virtues of filial piety and compassion for the needy within its culture. Historical records indicate that from the Xia, Shang, and Zhou dynasties, China enacted a series of tax reduction policies aimed at supporting individuals with disabilities. Subsequent dynasties also introduced various support measures and established dedicated institutions to provide care for the disabled. However, due to limitations in productivity, social stability, and the level of educational development at the time, the comprehensive implementation of education for children with special needs was never fully realized.

### 3.1. Special education in China at its early stages (1874-1949)

The origins of special education in China can be traced back to the late 19th century, when it was established by foreign individuals who introduced Western educational principles. However, during this period, government support was minimal, and most funding was provided by religious organizations. Consequently, special education progressed slowly and lacked unified training objectives and standardized teaching content [11]. According to available data, China's first school for the blind, Gusu Tongwenguan, was founded by British missionary William Moon in Beijing in 1874. Initially enrolling only two students, the institution expanded to over 200 students within 50 years [12]. In the 1920s, the school relocated to the western part of Beijing and was renamed 'Qiming Ancient Pastoral Academy,' where it offered religious and cultural education alongside vocational training. However, due to social unrest and financial challenges, the school faced a period of suspension.

In 1887, American missionaries Mary and Charles established the first school for the deaf, Dengzhou Qiyin School, which was later moved to Yantai and renamed Yantai Qiyin School. Other special education institutions, such as the David Hill School for the Blind, St. Mary's School for the Deaf, and the Shanghai School for Blind Children, were also founded by foreigners,

thereby introducing Western educational concepts. It was not until 1916 that Zhang Jian established the Nanjing Municipal School for the Deaf and Dumb in Nantong, Jiangsu Province. Following nearly 40 years of early special education development in China, this institution marked the establishment of the first modern public special education school founded by the Chinese themselves [13].

Despite the social unrest caused by the Revolution of 1911, enthusiasm for education among the populace remained high, and the New Culture Movement advocated for the implementation of a national education plan [14]. During this period, special education was integrated into the national education system; however, due to the predominance of religious organizations in the management of special education schools, societal attitudes toward the support of individuals with disabilities had not yet undergone a complete transformation. To maintain their influence in the realm of special education, religious organizations increased their investments, enhancing both the quality of instruction and the characteristics of the schools, thereby establishing special education as a significant component of church-led education [15]. The government of the time began to recognize the educational rights of individuals with disabilities, which encompassed two facets: first, the expansion of special education initiatives by Western missionaries in China fostered greater influence, alleviated religious conflicts, and encouraged public engagement; second, the development of special education gradually contributed to the establishment of a modern educational system and the enhancement of educational standards. By 1949, China had 42 schools for the blind and deaf, serving approximately 2,380 students, primarily managed by charitable and religious institutions.

### 3.2. The development period of special education in China (1952-1994)

Following the establishment of the People's Republic of China, the government committed to transforming special education into a public service and integrating it into the national education system [16]. Special education was incorporated into this system and managed by a specialized agency. To facilitate the development of special education, the government enacted a series of laws that provided a legal foundation and guidance [17]. During this time, the government assumed control of special schools previously managed by religious organizations and established the Department of Blind and Deaf Education, appointing Huang Nai, a visually impaired individual, as director and Hong Xueli, a hearing-impaired individual, as assistant. Furthermore, special education was included in the national five-year plan, thereby ensuring educational order and stability. Since then, there has been a significant increase in the number of special education schools, marking the beginning of a new era in educational provision.

Despite the increase in the number of special education schools during this period, data from 1988 indicated that the enrollment rate for school-age children was 97.1%, while the enrollment rate for children with disabilities was less than 6%. Correspondingly, the proportion of illiterates and semi-illiterates in the country was as high as 20.6%, with individuals with disabilities representing a significant portion of this group, 66.37% of whom were semi-illiterate. These statistics highlight a substantial gap between the development of special education and that of general education at the time. In response to this challenge, the government enhanced its support for special education and enacted several laws aimed at promoting the rapid advancement of this field [18]. The first explicit mention of education for the disabled in the Constitution in 1982 marked the beginning of the country's focus on the educational rights of this special group. Subsequently, the Compulsory Education Law, enacted in 1986, further expanded these rights and specifically included provisions for the establishment of schools for special needs children. The 1990 Law on the Protection of Persons with Disabilities placed greater emphasis on ensuring that individuals with disabilities have equal educational opportunities. In 1994, the state introduced the first law specifically addressing the education of persons with disabilities, the Regulations on the Education of Persons with Disabilities, which outlined clear legal provisions for the implementation of educational programs for this population. The successive introduction of these laws and regulations not only provides robust legal protection for special education but also establishes a solid foundation for its future development.

### 3.3. The accelerated growth period of special education in China (1994-2022)

As of 2022, China has made significant progress in special education. The number of special education schools, the scale of enrollment, and the total number of students enrolled have all increased markedly, effectively addressing the educational needs of disabled students. Concurrently, there has been a notable rise in the number of disabled individuals pursuing higher education, as well as improvements in both the quantity and professionalism of special education teachers. Participation in teacher training programs has also seen a continuous increase. Furthermore, government financial investment in special education has risen substantially, ensuring the sustainable development of this sector [19].

In 2012, China had 1,853 special education schools, accommodating 378,751 students, of which 65,699 were actively enrolled. By 2022, the number of special education schools had increased to 2,314, and the number of actively enrolled students rose to 146,257, contributing to a total of 918,502 students receiving education and effectively addressing the educational needs of children with disabilities. Concurrently, the number of special education teachers also experienced significant growth. According to data from the Ministry of Education, the number of special education teachers increased from 43,697 in 2012 to

74,390 in 2022, accompanied by notable enhancements in their academic qualifications and professional titles. By 2022, the number of teachers holding bachelor's degrees or higher rose from 23,094 to over 57,995, while those with senior professional titles increased from 25,465 in 2012 to more than 42,000. Refer to Table 1 below for further details.

The rapid development of special education is closely linked to financial support. In the Special Education Improvement Plan (2014-2016) and the Second Phase Special Education Improvement Plan (2017-2020), the Chinese government increased the per-student public funding standard for special education schools to 6,000 yuan. This financial boost has contributed to a significant rise in the enrollment rate of disabled children in compulsory education, increasing from 72.1% in 2012 to over 95% in 2021, which reflects China's success in enhancing enrollment rates for this population. Notably, the conditions for individuals with disabilities to access higher education in China are steadily improving. According to the Statistical Bulletin on the Development of Disability in China in 2021, a total of 16,861 individuals entered universities in China that year, including 14,559 disabled students admitted to regular colleges and universities and 2,302 disabled students who enrolled in specialized higher education institutions. Furthermore, from 2011 to 2021, total investment in special education in China rose from 8.473 billion yuan to 19.870 billion yuan, nearly doubling the amount. On a per capita basis, education expenditure for special education increased from 45,800 yuan to 63,200 yuan [20]. This growth in special education highlights the government's strong support for the sector, particularly in compulsory education, higher education, and teacher training. However, despite these overall advancements, certain regions still exhibit shortcomings in teaching facilities, barrier-free environments, and the welfare of teachers and students. Moving forward, the Chinese government must maintain its commitment to substantial investment and policy support.

**Table 1.** Basic information of Special Education Schools in China

	Number of special education schools	Number of students	Number of students enrolled	Full-time Teachers	Master's degree or above	Bachelor degree	Number of people with intermediate professional titles or above
2012	1853	378,751	65,699	43,697	614	22,480	25,465
2013	1933	368,103	65,977	45,653	703	25,068	26,904
2014	2000	394,870	70,713	48,125	846	27,833	28,401
2015	2053	442,223	83,314	50,334	957	30,244	29,412
2016	2080	491,740	91,521	53,213	1,085	33,386	30,933
2017	2107	578,826	110,843	55,979	1,246	36,624	31,991
2018	2152	665,942	123,514	58,656	1,428	39,809	33,078
2019	2192	794,612	144,211	62,358	1,632	43,618	25,730
2020	2244	880,800	149,046	66,169	1,872	47,790	38,491
2021	2288	919,767	149,062	70,925	2,216	51,431	40,049
2022	2314	918,502	146,257	74,390	2,530	55,465	42,039

Note: Data from the Ministry of Education of China (Number of Students of Formal Education by Type and Level and Number of Schools, Educational Personnel and Full-time Teachers by Type and Level and Number of Full-time, Teachers in Special Education Schools by Academic Qualifications and Professional Rank)

#### **4. The challenges facing special education in China today**

Despite the significant progress made in China's special education over the past few decades, further advancements in this field continue to encounter numerous challenges. While there has been a gradual increase in educational resources and a continuous enhancement of relevant policies, resulting in improved coverage and quality of special education, several underlying issues remain that require attention and resolution.

##### **4.1. Incomplete legislation and inadequate support systems**

As a relatively young field, special education in China has a limited policy history, with corresponding legislation emerging at a later stage. During the critical phases of policy formulation, a lack of comprehensive on-site research often hampers legislators' ability to fully and accurately understand the actual needs of special education, leading to a significant disconnect between legal provisions and the realities on the ground. Furthermore, as a vast country with a large population, China exhibits considerable disparities in economic development and the distribution of educational resources across different regions, resulting in varied implementations of special education nationwide. In certain areas, insufficient financial investment has hindered the development of special education, making it challenging to achieve optimal conditions regarding teaching facilities, teacher resources, and educational quality [21]. The inadequacy of legislative and policy safeguards has further exacerbated this issue, preventing the comprehensive fulfillment of special education needs.

##### **4.2. Focus on disabilities, neglecting giftedness and learning disabilities**

For an extended period, deeply entrenched traditional concepts have dominated China's education system, perpetuating outdated educational beliefs [22]. This phenomenon has resulted in an excessive focus on physical disabilities within special education, while the needs of gifted students and those with learning disabilities have been significantly overlooked. Furthermore, the lack of sufficient expertise has contributed to inadequate research on the identification mechanisms for giftedness and learning disabilities, which has further delayed policy development. Consequently, the resulting imbalance in the allocation of educational resources has prioritized the available resources for the education of individuals with disabilities, while the needs of other special groups have been severely neglected [23]. This inequitable allocation of resources has hindered the provision of necessary support and attention to gifted and talented students, as well as those facing challenges in the learning process, thereby impeding their overall development.

##### **4.3. Lack of assessment tools and prolonged development**

China, as a multi-ethnic nation, hosts 56 ethnic groups that have developed diverse lifestyles and customs across its vast territory. Although some cities have achieved close integration with the international community, many regions continue to preserve traditional ways of life and customs. The development of assessment tools in special education in China faces significant challenges, largely due to linguistic and textual barriers. Internationally adopted assessment methods are not entirely compatible with China's specific context [24]. Furthermore, the shortage of localized professional talent, including a lack of experts and scholars, combined with the significant resources and time required for the development of these tools, has severely hindered the advancement of scientific tools for the efficient identification of special populations. As a result, China still faces a considerable gap in the accumulation of diverse and effective assessment tools.

##### **4.4. The allocation of special education equipment resources is unbalanced**

This imbalance arises from various factors, with one prominent issue being the vast geographical expanse of China, which results in uneven national economic development. For instance, there are significant disparities in economic income levels between eastern and western cities, as well as between coastal and inland areas. Additionally, the equipment necessary for special education is often expensive, and while China has made considerable investments in education in recent years, the available funding remains relatively limited. This financial constraint impedes the adequate provision of special education equipment to meet actual needs. Furthermore, there is a lack of effective management and oversight mechanisms in the procurement and distribution of equipment, which leads to instances of resource wastage and unequal distribution. Due to insufficient regulation

and poor planning, some special education institutions may struggle to obtain the necessary equipment, while others may possess unused equipment that fails to serve its intended purpose [25]. This uneven distribution of resources not only impacts the quality of special education but also constrains its overall development.

#### 4.5. Shortage of qualified teachers and the need for professional development

China's teacher education system has long been recognized for its strength and depth; however, certain shortcomings persist in the training of special education teachers. Specifically, the curriculum for special education teacher training lacks comprehensive support courses related to special education, resulting in gaps in both professional knowledge and practical skills among educators [26]. Moreover, the career development prospects for special education teachers are hindered by unclear pathways for career advancement, which diminishes motivation for professional growth. Over the past decade, special education teachers have encountered significant challenges, including high levels of work-related stress and relatively low remuneration [27]. These factors have contributed to an increasing rate of talent attrition within the field. Faced with heavy workloads and limited financial incentives, many teachers choose to leave the profession in pursuit of more attractive career opportunities. This exodus of talent not only affects the quality and effectiveness of special education but also exacerbates the already critical shortage of qualified teachers in this field.

#### 4.6. Inconsistent responsibilities and lack of dedicated management personnel

Special education is a complex field that encompasses multiple departments and professionals, necessitating close collaboration among experts from various disciplines. This collaboration includes, but is not limited to, working alongside medical professionals, cooperating with general education teachers to ensure that special education students receive appropriate care and support within mainstream educational settings, partnering with community workers to facilitate better social integration for students, and maintaining strong communication with parents to ensure that home and school collaborate effectively on the students' development. This collaboration is essential to meet the physical and psychological needs of students [28]. Such cross-departmental cooperation requires high levels of coordination and collaboration; without it, there is a risk of unclear responsibilities and overlapping duties. However, a more significant issue is that the management system for special education has yet to establish a comprehensive framework, which leads to numerous operational challenges. The lack of dedicated personnel is a prominent problem, as it results in insufficient professionals to handle the specific tasks related to special education, thereby compromising the quality and efficiency of the work. Furthermore, the absence of clear management processes presents another critical issue, resulting in administrative confusion and inconsistency, which in turn leads to a lack of systematic and coherent implementation of special education. Due to these factors, the overall management capacity and professional standards within special education are generally inadequate, negatively affecting both the quality of education and the growth and development of students.

### 5. Reasons why special education has problems

The various challenges faced in the development of special education are rooted in significant underlying causes. Researchers must engage in comprehensive discussion and analysis to tackle these issues and foster the progress of special education.

#### 5.1. Inadequate legislation for special education

The legislation concerning special education in China remains incomplete, and the support systems require enhancement, a situation shaped by both historical and social developmental factors [29]. Special education in China began relatively late, mirroring a global trend in which special education has lagged behind general education in its development. Initially, the legislative and policy development for special education in China progressed in tandem with the broader educational framework of the country. However, due to a prior lack of understanding regarding special education, the legislative process has been comparatively slow. For example, Article 19 of China's Compulsory Education Law defines the subjects of special compulsory education as "children and adolescents of school age with visual, hearing, speech, and intellectual disabilities." In contrast, the 14th Five-Year Plan for the Development and Promotion of Special Education, issued by the Ministry of Education and seven other ministries, broadens this definition to encompass "children and adolescents with visual, hearing, speech, physical, intellectual, mental, multiple disabilities, and other special needs." A comparative analysis of these legislative policy documents concerning "disabled persons" and "special education subjects" reveals discrepancies in their specificity, ranging from broad to narrow and concise to detailed [30]. For example, while Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) are a crucial component of special education, their implementation suffers from a lack of effective oversight due to the absence of binding legal documents.

In practice, the lack of a dedicated legislative body or supervisory agency to enforce IEP-related provisions, combined with inadequate constraints from special education laws and regulations, significantly impedes effective management at the local education level. As a result, the intended purpose of individualized education plans frequently remains unfulfilled. Despite the existence of well-established special education laws and support systems internationally, China has been slow to adopt and localize these practices, lacking policy support that aligns with international standards. Consequently, the special education legal system in China is deficient in advanced theoretical support regarding overall design and protective mechanisms. Furthermore, although some policies and laws related to special education exist, their effective implementation is often hindered by insufficient local financial investment and inadequate management systems. Additionally, differences between Chinese social culture and legal systems and those of Western countries present cultural and systemic adaptation barriers that further impede the localization process of international experiences in China.

## 5.2. Reasons for the incomplete coverage of special education categories

In China, the issue of incomplete coverage in special education can be attributed to several factors [31]. On one hand, there is a relatively limited public understanding and concern regarding various special groups, such as individuals with disabilities, exceptionally gifted students, and those with learning disabilities. This general lack of awareness about the importance of special education contributes to a narrow focus within the field. On the other hand, the diverse and highly individualized needs of special education students, coupled with the high costs associated with providing comprehensive support—including medical, rehabilitative, and psychological services—pose significant barriers to the holistic development of special education categories. These costs impede the ability to offer all-encompassing support for each category of special needs, thereby affecting the breadth of special education provision. Furthermore, the social demand for special education services has not been fully articulated, and current legal protections for special education do not effectively encompass these diverse groups. Historical prejudice is indeed one of the contributing factors, as the one-dimensional perception of the term "special education" has led many parents to believe that it constitutes discrimination against individuals with disabilities. This misconception further results in inadequate attention being given to both exceptionally gifted students and those with learning disabilities within the context of special education.

## 5.3. Reasons for the shortage of research talent in special education

The development of high-level research talent in special education, particularly those proficient in the creation and application of various evaluation tools and teaching methods, is closely linked to the advancement of the training system. Currently, there are 67 universities in China that offer undergraduate programs in special education teacher training. However, the training of special education teachers faces several challenges, including "ambiguous teacher role positioning and unclear career orientation" as well as a curriculum that is "biased towards theory and general knowledge, lacking practicality and professionalism" [32]. Zhao et al analyzed 27 talent training programs for special education teacher training across Chinese universities and found that while these programs share commonalities in goals, content, and concepts, they also exhibit deficiencies [33]. These include a mismatch between training goals and actual demands, insufficient professional characteristics reflected in core professional courses, and an unreasonable number of courses within the curriculum system that fail to support graduation requirements. Consequently, the current educational framework in China does not adequately foster the development of comprehensive professionals, resulting in a deficiency of high-level research teams and innovation capabilities [34]. Furthermore, effective professionals in this field require interdisciplinary knowledge that encompasses psychology, education, statistics, and other domains [35]. While the significance of special education in China is undeniably recognized, the development of evaluation tools has not been a primary focus of Chinese educational research. Liu Quanli examined the master's programs in special education at eight universities in China recognized for their advanced development in this field. The study revealed that five institutions offer courses on measurement and assessment for special children; however, the nomenclature of these courses varies significantly [36]. In a related study, Song Jian highlighted that a search through the Chinese journal retrieval platform indicated a lack of research on the teaching reform of courses specifically focused on the "Measurement and Assessment of Special Children." Additionally, funding for research, testing, and the promotion of special education evaluation tools remains insufficient [37]. More financial resources are typically allocated to the direct purchase of teaching equipment rather than the development of evaluation tools. Currently, China lacks clear policy guidance and incentive mechanisms for special education research, resulting in inadequate policy support and motivation. Consequently, educational institutions and researchers often lack direction and drive, further impeding progress in this field. This situation is also influenced by China's educational policies; for instance, the prevailing evaluation methods still rely on examination formats. Such conservative approaches restrict the development and adoption of innovative evaluation tools. These issues represent several significant factors contributing to the shortage of scientific research talent in special education.

#### 5.4. Reasons for the uneven distribution of special education resources

China's vastness contributes to significant disparities in economic development across its regions. Economically developed areas are better positioned to allocate resources to special education, whereas less developed regions often encounter financial constraints. In economically disadvantaged areas, local governments face limited fiscal revenues and inadequate educational funding, which hampers their ability to allocate sufficient resources to the specialized field of special education [38]. The financial allocation mechanism in China exacerbates this issue; special schools in economically developed regions tend to receive a disproportionately higher share of resources, while those in poorer areas receive insufficient support, leading to a concentration of resources in certain locales. The current educational resource allocation process in China requires coordination between the central and local governments. However, conflicts of interest and responsibility between these two levels can complicate this process. Additionally, some local governments and educational authorities lack long-term planning for special education, resulting in a reactive rather than proactive approach to resource allocation. This often leads to inefficient and inequitable outcomes. Furthermore, resource allocators frequently focus on short-term interests or immediate needs, neglecting the long-term developmental nature of special education. This lack of foresight contributes to the unsustainability of resource allocation, further exacerbating the overall inequity in the distribution of resources for special education initiatives.

#### 5.5. Reasons for the inadequate management of special education

The management of special education is not confined to a single department; rather, it involves multiple sectors, including education, health, and disability services. However, the overlapping responsibilities among these departments can result in issues such as the transfer of responsibilities and inefficiencies in the management process [39]. Furthermore, the history of special education management in China is relatively brief, and systematic management practices are still evolving. In the face of complex situations and diverse needs, managers often lack the experience necessary to effectively address intricate issues. Many special education schools in various regions still do not have dedicated full-time special education managers; instead, middle-level management roles are frequently filled by teachers who also bear teaching responsibilities. Management in the realm of special education differs significantly from that in general education, necessitating specialized knowledge, skills, and competencies. The involvement of leaders who lack effective management capabilities in this highly specialized area may inevitably result in subpar management quality. Currently, China faces a shortage of well-trained management professionals within the field of special education. This deficiency implies that while some individuals may excel in teaching, they may not possess adequate management skills, and conversely, those with strong management abilities may lack the requisite expertise in special education. This mismatch limits the development and efficacy of the management system [40]. Consequently, these challenges contribute to the high costs associated with trial and error in the field of special education, making it difficult to enhance the practice of special education management swiftly and effectively.

#### 5.6. Reasons for insufficient social participation and support in special education

The general public's understanding of special education is quite limited [41]. There are significant challenges in fully promoting the information, laws, regulations, and social responsibilities associated with special education. Furthermore, while the public often expresses sympathy towards individuals with disabilities, this sentiment can sometimes be accompanied by misunderstanding and prejudice. Such misconceptions hinder the visibility of special education topics in public discourse, and those addressing these issues often lack clear guidance on how to engage and support special education initiatives. Consequently, government and non-governmental organizations face difficulties in raising funds, integrating resources, and mobilizing social support. Key questions arise, such as how volunteers and social workers can effectively participate, how to establish a sustainable community support network, and how to encourage widespread social involvement and support. This has resulted in a tendency for frequent short-term initiatives rather than long-term strategic planning and collaboration. The absence of enduring solutions or comprehensive approaches has led to ineffective resource sharing and a lack of consensus-based cooperation models, ultimately contributing to insufficient social participation and support for special education.

### 6. Countermeasures and suggestions for the development of special education

#### 6.1. Improve the legislative system, strengthen legal supervision and enforcement

Under the principle of the unity of opposites between universality and particularity, the Chinese government should develop and enact the "Special Education Law of the People's Republic of China" to gradually establish a comprehensive legislative framework for special education [42]. It is essential to clearly define the responsibilities and obligations of governments at all



levels, educational departments, and social organizations to ensure the operability and enforceability of these laws. Furthermore, a robust legal supervision mechanism should be established based on these legal frameworks to guarantee the effective implementation of special education laws and regulations nationwide. Additionally, efforts should be made to enhance public and professional awareness of these laws, which may involve the creation of a dedicated supervisory body or the strengthening of independent third-party oversight to ensure fairness and transparency in policy implementation.

#### 6.2. Expand the coverage of special education

Government and educational departments should clearly define the scope of special education, enhance mechanisms for assessing and identifying special education needs, and ensure that all students requiring special education are promptly detected and evaluated. The development of special education and inclusive education in China must fundamentally build its theoretical and practical framework around the concept of 'disability.' Additionally, the definition of 'special educational needs' should focus on children with disabilities as well as those on the verge of disability [43]. Promoting the use of scientifically effective assessment tools and providing training for relevant personnel can significantly improve the accuracy and comprehensiveness of evaluations. Furthermore, encouraging the integration of regular schools with special education schools will foster inclusive education, ensuring that all students receive instruction in the most appropriate environment.

#### 6.3. Increase efforts in talent development

The government and universities should enhance academic research and talent training in the field of special education. Currently, only two universities in China offer doctoral programs in special education; thus, it is essential to either increase the availability of doctoral training or actively recruit high-level overseas talent to foster the development of master's degree programs for special education teachers [44]. Although the number of universities training doctoral students in special education has risen over the past decade, there remains a pressing need to further expand the number of doctoral candidates or graduate positions in this field. This expansion will support the development of related disciplines and attract more talented individuals to engage in special education research. Furthermore, fostering collaboration and idea exchange between domestic special education researchers and their international counterparts will facilitate the incorporation of advanced international research findings and educational concepts, thereby enhancing the quality of domestic special education research. Establishing a comprehensive career development framework for special education researchers, along with providing greater career advancement opportunities and promotion pathways, will increase the appeal of careers in special education research.

#### 6.4. Optimize resource allocation mechanisms

The government should implement a more scientifically informed and rational mechanism for the allocation of special education resources to ensure equitable distribution, particularly focusing on economically underdeveloped and rural areas. Additionally, targeted investments should be made for students with severe disabilities [45]. It is essential to encourage collaboration between developed and underdeveloped regions through 'pairing assistance' models, which will facilitate resource sharing and the exchange of experiences, thereby enhancing the quality of special education in less developed areas. Furthermore, it is important to leverage information technology to create a national unified platform for the management of special education resources. This platform should enable real-time monitoring and allocation of resources, improve transparency and efficiency in distribution, and ensure that resources are accurately delivered to the areas and schools that require them.

#### 6.5. Improve the management system

Enhance the special education management system by clearly defining the management responsibilities at various levels of government and educational departments. Establish dedicated management agencies or positions to ensure professionalism and systematic oversight of special education. Strengthen coordination between central and local governments to promote policy uniformity and effective implementation. Create regular management evaluation and feedback mechanisms to promptly identify and address issues, ensuring continuous improvement and optimization of special education management. Encourage education managers to develop a deep understanding of the characteristics and needs of special education. Provide systematic professional training for special education managers to enhance their management skills and professional competence, thereby improving the relevance and effectiveness of management practices.

## 6.6. Enhance social awareness and education

The government should implement policies that encourage businesses, non-profit organizations, and individuals to engage in activities that support special education. Incentives such as tax reductions, honorary titles, and financial subsidies can be offered to stimulate enthusiasm across all sectors of society. Additionally, creating diversified platforms for social involvement will provide convenient participation channels for businesses, social organizations, and volunteers. It is also essential to increase awareness of special education through various media and educational training methods, thereby enhancing societal recognition and emphasis on this important field. By encouraging the public, businesses, and social organizations to actively participate in supporting and servicing special education, we can achieve effective integration and utilization of social resources.

## 7. Conclusion

China's educational history is extensive, and special education, as an integral component of the Chinese educational system, primarily serves children with physical and mental differences. In recent years, special education in China has made remarkable strides, evidenced by significant increases in the number of special education schools, student enrollment, and the fulfillment of educational needs. Furthermore, the number of disabled students entering higher education has risen, teacher training and professional standards have improved, and national funding has increased substantially. However, the rapid development of special education in China has also introduced several challenges, including incomplete legislation, unequal resource distribution, a lack of assessment tools, inadequate special education equipment, insufficient teacher resources, and an underdeveloped management system. These issues are rooted in historical and social development factors, such as the late inception of special education, insufficient public awareness, an underdeveloped system for training specialized personnel, uneven regional economic development, overlapping responsibilities among multiple managing departments, and inadequate social participation and support. To promote the advancement of special education, it is recommended that China enhance the legislative framework, strengthen legal supervision and enforcement, and broaden the coverage of educational services. Concurrently, efforts should be directed toward improving the training of special education professionals, optimizing resource allocation, establishing a robust management system, and increasing social awareness and education to encourage broader societal participation and support for special education.

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