

# A Study on the Talent Training Program for Inclusive Early Childhood Education — Taking Province G in China as an Example

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## Abstract

Early childhood education is the foundation of basic education, and inclusive early childhood education is an important part of China's education system. The training and quality of teachers in early childhood education are key to ensuring "efforts to ensure that every child can enjoy fair and quality education." The training program for early childhood education professionals is a guiding document for the standard and quality of teacher training, the organization of educational teaching, the implementation of the training process, and the certification of student graduation qualifications. A good training program promotes universities to cultivate high-quality professional and innovative teachers, which is beneficial to the development of high-quality inclusive early childhood education. Analyzing 14 texts of training programs for early childhood education teacher education majors in universities, we found that in terms of training objectives, the talent training objectives for "integration education literacy" lack accurate training positioning and characteristics. The setting of inclusive education courses is unreasonable, with an insufficient number of courses, mainly elective courses, few required courses, a narrow range of course offerings, and a teaching format that is more theoretical than practical. The course offering time is relatively concentrated and late, the assessment methods are mainly based on examinations, and the assessment methods are single. Therefore, universities should adjust the talent training objectives, offer a reasonable structure, scope, quantity, and duration of inclusive education courses, improve the course assessment methods, and ensure high-quality pre-service training for inclusive early childhood education teachers.

**Keywords:** early childhood education, inclusive education, talent training program

## 1. Introduction

The current development of early childhood education in China is focused on the theme of "quality and equitable education." Inclusive early childhood education plays a crucial role in expanding and enhancing the quality of basic education in the new period. The 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China emphasized the importance of "running early childhood education and special education well," while the 20th National Congress highlighted the need to "strengthen the inclusive development of early childhood education and special education." In 2021, the "14th Five-Year Plan for the Development and Enhancement of Special Education" introduced the idea of "promoting inclusive education and enhancing the integration of general education and special education," as well as the development of preschool special education.

In the era of comprehensively promoting the modernization of education, actively developing inclusive early childhood education is the main theme of special education reform in China (Zhu & Huang, 2024). The key to achieving high-quality and inclusive development of early childhood education in China lies in cultivating inclusive education teachers, especially the need to cultivate a team of teachers with high-level inclusive educational competence.

Current preschool inclusive education is still in the exploratory stage, with a gap in achieving "high-quality

preschool inclusive education,” which is a weak link in the construction of a high-quality education system (Deng et al., 2024; Qiu, 2023). Research by Li and Zhao (2019) revealed that preschool inclusive education in China started late, facing issues like insufficient teaching staff, low quality, and poor educational outcomes. Currently, the pre-service and in-service training of kindergarten teachers in China for preschool inclusive education is not ideal (Wei et al., 2022). Wang’s study (2023) found that preschool inclusive education teachers face issues such as incomplete establishment of inclusive education concepts, lack of knowledge, and the need for improvement in professional skills. The team of preschool inclusive education teachers is still in the construction stage and requires more effort to be put in (Li & Luo, 2024).

Universities play an important and unique role in cultivating future early childhood education teachers. The professional talent training program for early childhood education is a key document for the specification and quality of teacher training, which serves as a direct basis for organizing education and teaching, implementing the training process, and accrediting students’ graduation qualifications. A good talent training program enables universities to cultivate high-quality, professional, and innovative teachers, conducive to the development of high-quality early childhood inclusive education.

As a frontier region in China’s economic development and educational reform, G Province’s higher education system plays an important exemplary role nationwide. Therefore, by analyzing the talent training program for early childhood education in G Province’s universities, we can gain in-depth understanding of the current situation and challenges of early childhood education majors in the field of inclusive education. This can further provide a scientific basis and practical reference for optimizing talent training programs and enhancing the inclusive education capabilities of early childhood education majors.

## 2. Research Methods

This study analyzes the talent training program for early childhood education majors in 14 universities in province G of China using text analysis. It examines various aspects of the program such as educational goals, course arrangement, nature of courses, implementation methods, class hours, and assessment methods. Additionally, a comparative study is conducted between talent training programs in undergraduate colleges and vocational colleges. Commonalities and deficiencies are identified, and optimization strategies for integrating education in talent training programs for early childhood education majors are proposed. The aim is to provide a reference for future talent training in preschool inclusive education majors.

According to the principle of convenient sampling, we collected talent training programs from 9 undergraduate colleges and 5 vocational colleges through online downloads and phone contacts (sample colleges are listed in Table 1).

Table 1. List of the 14 sample colleges

Type of college	School Code	Sample college	School Code	Sample college
Undergraduate	A	South China Normal University	F	Jiaying University
	B	Guangzhou University	G	Lingnan Normal University
	C	Guangdong Polytechnic Normal University	H	Shaoguan University
	D	Foshan University	I	Zhanjiang University of Science and Technology
	E	Hanshan Normal University		
Specialty	J	Guangzhou Early Childhood Education College	M	Guangdong Nanhua Vocational College of Industry and Commerce
	K	Zhanjiang Early Childhood Education College	N	Guangdong Meizhou Vocational and Technical College
	L	Shantou Early Childhood Education College		

## 3. Research Results

### 3.1 Training Objectives

The cultivation objectives are the specific requirements for talent cultivation formulated by various levels and types of institutions under the overall requirements of educational purposes. Through the sorting and comparative analysis of the talent cultivation objectives of early childhood education majors in 14 higher education institutions, it was found that firstly, the cultivation of talent in early childhood education emphasizes the comprehensive development of political beliefs, professional ethics, professional concepts, professional knowledge, and practical skills. Secondly, there are differences in professional requirements and career development positioning. Undergraduate institutions focus on cultivating high-quality early childhood education teachers for the whole country and the province, emphasizing qualities such as “high-level,” “research ability,” and “backbone teacher.” On the other hand, college institutions focus on training application-oriented early childhood education teachers to serve local areas, emphasizing skills such as “educational teaching,” “practical skills,” and “composite technical skills.” Finally, regarding the expression of talent “graduation requirements” or “cultivation standards,” most of them have macro descriptions based on the requirements of landmark documents such as the “Teacher Education Curriculum Standards (Trial)” and the “Kindergarten Teacher Professional Standards (Trial).” To some extent, it reflects the consistency of the understanding of talent cultivation in early childhood education majors among higher education institutions. The cultivation objectives all focus on the cultivation of qualities and abilities related to early childhood education. However, there are few requirements for talent cultivation objectives related to the “integration of educational quality”; with only two institutions mentioning the cultivation of talents for “special education work, special education institutions” in their objectives. This lack of precise positioning and features needs to be addressed.

Table 2. Objectives of Talent Cultivation in Early Childhood Education Major (5 Universities as Examples)

Sample college	Training objectives
A	Cultivate kindergarten expert backbone teachers with profound educational feelings, certain international vision and scientific and humanistic accomplishment, as well as solid professional knowledge, outstanding teaching abilities, strong research interests, and simultaneously supply high-level education sources for early childhood education majors, cultivate teaching, research, and management personnel for various children’s education institutions, and cultivate high-quality applied talents for institutions related to children’s work.
B	Cultivate early childhood education workers with good ethical standards and scientific and humanistic accomplishments, advanced educational concepts, solid professional knowledge, outstanding professional skills, strong research and collaborative abilities, and rich educational wisdom.
G	Cultivate comprehensive development in morality, intelligence, physical education, beauty, and labor, master basic knowledge and skills in early childhood education, possess advanced concepts and international vision in early childhood education, have competitiveness and sustainable development in professional capabilities, have the characteristics of “patriotism, teaching spirit, and solid character”, be able to adapt to the high-quality development of teacher education in the new era of the country and the modernization of early childhood education in Guangdong Province, and in the future be able to work in kindergartens, inclusive childcare centers, special education institutions, family education service institutions, education administrative departments, and other related early childhood education institutions engaging in teaching, consultation, management, and research, and grow into “four-have” high-quality early childhood teachers, even backbone teachers at the regional level.
M	Cultivate talented and applied talents engaged in early childhood care and education, and early childhood education management in kindergartens or other early childhood care institutions, with firm ideals and beliefs, comprehensive development in morality, intelligence, physical education, beauty, and labor, certain humanistic accomplishments, innovative awareness, awareness and ability for sustainable development, good professional ethics, scientific concepts of early childhood education, solid basic knowledge in early childhood education, and teaching and care capabilities.
Q	Cultivate kindergarten expert backbone teachers with profound educational feelings, certain international vision and scientific and humanistic accomplishment, as well as solid professional knowledge, outstanding teaching abilities, strong research interests, and simultaneously supply high-level education sources for early childhood education majors, cultivate teaching, research, and management personnel for various children’s education institutions, and cultivate high-quality applied talents for institutions related to children’s work.

### 3.2 Number of Inclusive Education Courses

The “Initiative for Enhancing the Professional Ability of Chinese Teachers in Inclusive Education” believes that enhancing the professional ability of teachers in inclusive education is a key step in promoting the development of inclusive education in China. It calls on higher normal schools to incorporate inclusive education into their training objectives, offer inclusive education general courses, and enable all normal students to possess basic professional literacy in inclusive education. Among the 14 universities, 2 schools have not offered any courses related to inclusive education, accounting for 14%; 10 schools only offer one course related to inclusive education, accounting for 72%; and 2 schools offer three courses related to inclusive education, accounting for 14%. It can be seen that the majority of universities have an insufficient number of courses in inclusive education.

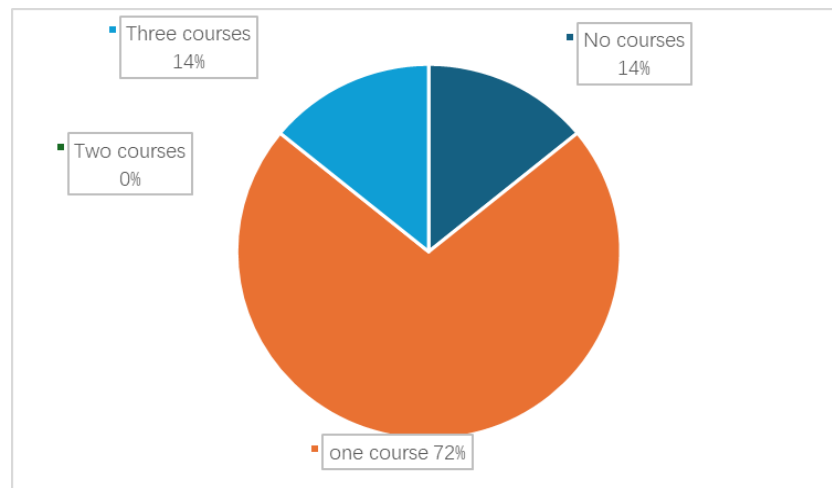


Figure 1. Course offerings in inclusive education

### 3.3 Integration of Educational Curriculum Types

The “14th Five-Year Plan” for the development and improvement of special education clearly states the following actions: promote the inclusion of special education courses in teacher education programs, make them compulsory and increase their proportion, incorporate them into the indicators for teacher education accreditation, and implement the requirement for special education content in teacher qualification examinations.

Most of the fusion education courses offered by universities are elective courses, with only 4 universities offering compulsory courses, and just one university offering both compulsory and elective courses.

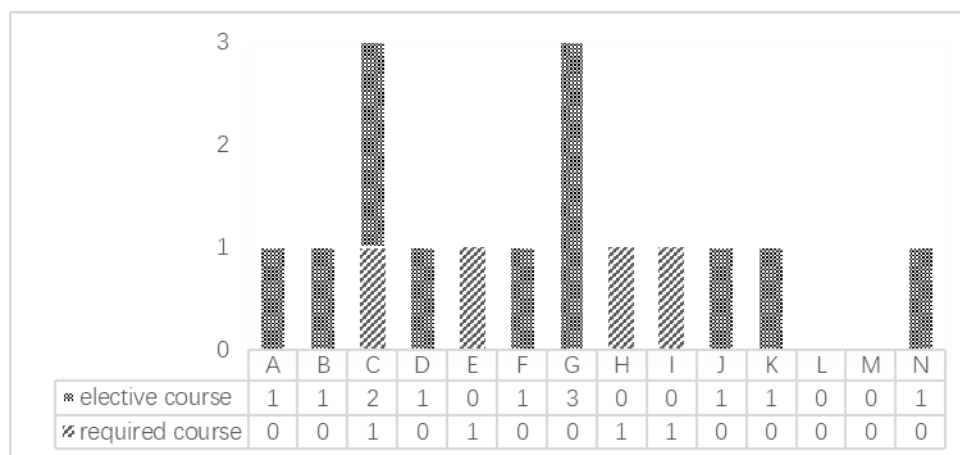


Figure 2. Provision of elective and required courses on inclusive education

### 3.4 Inclusive Education Courses

Based on the main content of the courses, the inclusive education courses offered by various schools can be divided into three categories: courses on special education for children, courses on the development and

psychology of special children, and courses on practical guidance for special children. Statistical frequency indicates that the main categories of courses offered by universities are special education and psychology courses, while the number of practical courses is relatively small, and the variety is limited.

Table 3. Inclusive education courses

Course category	Course name	Frequency
Special Education Courses	Preschool Special Education	4
	Introduction to Special Education	1
	Study of Special Education	2
	Introduction to Special Education for Special Children	2
Special Children Development and Psychology Courses	Special Children Development and Learning	1
	Special Needs Children Development and Learning	1
	Special Children Psychology and Education	1
	Special Children Development and Education	1
Special Children Practical Guidance Courses	Early Intervention and Treatment	1
	Theory and Practice of Individualized Education Plans	1

### 3.5 Hours and Composition of Inclusive Education Courses

In terms of credit settings, the main focus is on two credits, with the number of hours ranging from 20 to 48. In terms of teaching methods, eight institutions adopt a single theoretical teaching approach, while six schools use a combination of theoretical teaching and practical training. Among them, the proportion of practical training hours to total hours ranges from 8% to 25%.

Table 4. Class Hours for Inclusive Education Courses

Sample college	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N
Total teaching hours	32	32	48	32	32	32	34	32	32	20	36	0	0	24
Theoretical teaching	32	32	42	25	32	32	30	24	28	20	28	0	0	22
Laboratory and practical training	0	0	0	7	0	0	4	8	4	0	8	0	0	2

### 3.6 Course Start Semester and Assessment Method

Undergraduate universities typically offer inclusive education courses during the third academic year, primarily in the fifth and sixth semesters. Compulsory courses are usually assessed through exams, while elective courses are evaluated using alternative methods. Specialist colleges (with a 3-year program) offer courses in the second and third academic years.

## 4. Discussion and Suggestions

When it comes to training goals, there is a lack of accurate positioning and characteristics for the training goal of “integrating educational literacy” talents. It is evident that in terms of ideology and the level of talent training, universities have not given sufficient attention to cultivating inclusive educational literacy in pre-service teachers. There is a shortage of courses in the field of inclusive education, which makes it challenging to meet the demand for training talented individuals in this area. The types and content of inclusive education courses offered are not ideal, with elective courses being the primary focus and only a few required courses available. The content of inclusive education courses mainly focuses on courses related to special education for children and courses related to the development and psychology of special children. There are fewer courses that provide practical guidance for special children. The credits for inclusive education courses are mainly set at 2 credits, with traditional theoretical teaching being the main form. There is less emphasis on practical teaching, such as experiments and hands-on training. The timing for offering inclusive education courses is relatively limited and delayed, and the assessment methods for courses primarily consist of exams and evaluations, with evaluations being the primary form and the assessment methods being relatively limited.

Higher education institutions serve as crucial hubs for talent development, providing the necessary skills and knowledge required for societal progress. When it comes to nurturing talent, universities must tailor their training programs to align with their unique educational attributes and the specific strategies for social development in their local communities. There is a shortage of teaching staff in early childhood inclusive education, and a lack of integration of inclusive education resources, which has led to some universities being unable to offer inclusive education courses or teaching arrangements becoming merely formal. Universities should create embedded inclusive education courses, increase the number of inclusive education courses, especially compulsory ones, emphasize the practical hours of inclusive education, build a progressive practical teaching system oriented towards output (Li et al., 2024), and build individuals' practical knowledge and skills in inclusive education in real or quasi-real contexts (Wang & Fan, 2021). The assessment of early childhood inclusive education courses should be guided by course objectives, focus on the development of students' practical abilities, and design scientific forms of course assessment (Zhang, 2023).

In addition, universities should fully integrate their own and regional advantageous resources, change their mindset, shift from cultivating talents with a closed-door approach to fostering talents through diversified collaborative efforts, and promote in-depth cooperation between universities and enterprises through the integration of industry and education. For example, inviting special education experts from special education schools or institutions and front-line inclusive education teachers from kindergartens to teach courses at universities can meet the teaching needs of special education teachers in schools, build a more cohesive and efficient team of inclusive education teachers, create educational synergy, and promote the efficient and dynamic development of inclusive education.

### Fund Project

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