

“Untapped Talent” Research Report

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(Nov 2012 – Apr 2013)

Abstract of Research Report (English translation)

1. Overview

This research looks at the issue of fairness in higher education in China from the perspective of people with disabilities. The research was conducted over nine months, and the pre-study identified two research issues: 'What barriers do disabled people face both in access to higher education and in their studies?' and 'What is the cause of these barriers?' The research adopted qualitative research methods, and analyzed data collected and interviews in the field. The study population included 50 disabled students with different levels of education and experiencing a variety of obstacles. 16 were selected for follow-up research. The observations and experience of school principals, teachers and educators also formed an important part of the study.

The report is divided into three main parts. **The first part** includes Chapters 1-3. The research methods and angle are described, and the educational system, policy, law, and conceptions and views about society as related to education for disabled people are analyzed. The aim is to give readers an overall picture of education-related problems faced by people with disabilities. Chapter 2 looks at how the two-tier education system for disabled people developed and problems in the existing system are identified. Chapter 3 is about the present system of higher education for disabled people. The university entrance examination and the two-tier system of education for disabled people are analyzed and the deficiencies in system design and development

risks are pointed out.

The second part covers Chapters 4-8. Cases studies describe the specific kinds of barriers faced by disabled people receiving higher education and the reason for these barriers. Chapter 4 discusses over-age students entering school and higher education and shows how not being able to enter school at the right age is a barrier for disabled people entering higher education. Chapter 5 deals with teachers in the two-tier educational system and Chapter 6 deals with teachers in mainstream colleges and universities. It discusses certain outmoded ideas held by teachers that present barriers for disabled students receiving higher education. It also shows the powerlessness and passivity of teachers, who lack a support system within the educational system. Chapter 8 deals with barriers in living and looks at the barriers that disabled people face in their lives at mainstream colleges and universities. It also shows the psychological struggle that some disabled students experience. This section analyzes case studies and reflects problems of fairness faced by Chinese disabled students, from the time they start their education, during their education, and in the outcome of their education.

The third part covers Chapters 9 and 10. Chapter 9 offers some thoughts and specific answers to issues raised in the research. Chapter 10 makes some policy suggestions.

2. Part One: Background Knowledge

2.1 Introduction

This chapter gives the background to the research. It includes a definition of 'disability', numbers of people with disabilities and two disability-related concepts: discrimination against disability and reasonable accommodation. First, there is an analysis of the Chinese government and society's definition of disability from five angles: 1) the historical view of disability in Chinese society; 2) contemporary views

of disability in society; 3) the medical model of disability, the social model and physiological-psychological-social models; 4) the definition of disability given by the CRPD and the Law for the Protection of Disabled Persons (LPDP) and a comparison of the two; 5) the importance of having a correct definition of disability.

First, the report analyzes and compares ICF and the 'China classification criteria for deformities' as regards the numbers of people with disabilities in Chinese society. The report finds that the reason for the huge difference in statistical results lies in demarcation and the definition of standard deviation, and there is detailed discussion about this.

Finally, the report discusses the basic concept of disability discrimination and reasonable accommodation and also sets out the two principles for implementation in policy and law.

The qualitative research methods that have been adopted, the research ethics and the research validity are discussed. Firstly, it is pointed out that the qualitative research methods adopted in the report and the qualitative research methods used in Chinese sociological dissertations differ considerably and the latter are not actually qualitative research methods. The report also shows that the researcher's own disability and his experience of disability education were both favourable to conducting research, but were also a challenge. The researcher's attitude and the ways in which he dealt with such problems are discussed.

2.2 Chapter 2 The two-tier educational system

This chapter notes that a two-tier education system in its narrow sense is state education that offers two forms of education for students with certain types of disability. This is also known as 'two-stream education'. Such students include those with a visual disability, hearing disability and those with an intellectual disability. In

its broad sense, China's education for disabled people is 'special education' in opposition to 'mainstream education' and is a two-tier system both conceptually and systemically. The report discusses this from four aspects.

By analyzing of the development of education for disabled people in ancient, modern and present times, the report finds: 1) There is a tradition of 'heavy measures, light education', with no development of a comprehensive view of disability; 2) The educational model of special education colleges was introduced in modern times by western missionaries, providing some disabled people with opportunities for education, and this was the start of special education; 3) After the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, special education colleges set up by missionaries and ordinary Chinese people were incorporated into the state education system. The government made absolutely not changes to the educational model of these special education schools; 4) It was only in the 1980s that the government gradually adopted the *sui ban jiu du* (placing a disabled student in a mainstream classroom) educational model for disabled people, with the only aim being to increase the enrolment rate of disabled people in education, and not at all with the view of empowering disabled people through education; 5) Although since 1949 education for disabled people has developed towards the form of *sui ban jiu du* and higher education for disabled people, the main form of education continues to be special education schools, just as it was in the past when Western missionaries set up special schools for disabled people. The educational models for people with disabilities continue to be the philanthropic and medical models.

The report then summarizes Chinese law as confirming the key role of the two-tier system within the education system for disabled people and special education schools. Through an analysis of the proportion of allocation of educational funds and state education policy, the research shows that special schools are still a dominant feature in the two-tier system, occupying the vast proportion of funds and educational

resources that are allocated.

Special education as a main part of the two-tier educational system creates many internal contradictions for transformation into inclusive education. For example, because of the current huge expansion of special education schools, there is an inherent drive to compete with mainstream schools for student resources. It is hard to build up special education school resource centres because there is a conflict of interest between the resource centres' function and special education schools. The continued development of special education schools consolidates the outdated view of disability in society. The educational aims in special education schools compared to those of mainstream schools are also relatively low, constraining disabled students from gaining quality education. The goals of the special education schools is not to improve their teaching level and meet the development needs of students with disabilities, but rather to use the main experience to expand vocational education, and one-sidedly emphasize the importance of skills for earning a living.

2.3 Chapter 3 The university entrance examination and higher education

An investigation into the history of the development of higher education for people with disabilities shows that the position of higher education for disabled people does not feature prominently in their education as a whole, but on the contrary occupies a relatively low position. Higher education for disabled people also takes the form of a two-tier system within higher education: higher education special colleges and higher inclusive education.

Through a contrastive analysis of the present situation - higher education for disabled people and mainstream higher education - it is an unavoidable fact that higher education for disabled people lags far behind that of mainstream higher education. Especially, as the university entrance examination and higher education in expands rapidly in the general population, the standard of higher education for

disabled people remains relatively poor. In 2012 in the whole country, 7,229 disabled people were enrolled into mainstream higher education and 1,134 disabled people entered special education colleges (CDPF, 2013).

The policy model of stimulating the economy through the rapid expansion of enrolment into mainstream higher education has three main characteristics: overhasty and incomplete policy procedures; higher educational aims that are heavy on quantity and light on quality; and this policy determines the direction of education. This model leads to deviations in the entire education policy, and overlooks the opportunities for disabled people to receive an education.

In quality, special higher education institutions come under provincial- and municipal-level colleges and universities. Almost no special education colleges are under key national colleges and universities. The subjects taught by most higher education special colleges are divorced from the academic backgrounds of those institutions. A small number of subjects are taught which fit in with stereotyped ideas of higher education for disabled people. Disabled students who attend mainstream higher education colleges are not given reasonable accommodation and therefore standards are compromised.

The report goes on to analyze the four ways of enrolling students into higher education and analyzes each type of examination model and the relation to disabled examinees. The report shows that the law only stipulates the responsibilities between higher education colleges and universities and candidates and does not stipulate the government's responsibilities and duties. In organizing the university entrance examination and furnishing reasonable accommodation, the government is using a legal loophole to act as a 'non-neutral middleman'.

Case by case examination and enrolment is at present the most important

method of enrolling disabled students. The report analyzes why this case by case enrolment does not offer fair educational opportunities and constrains the transition towards inclusive education.

3. Part 2 Case Analysis

3.1 Chapter 4 Over-age students entering school and higher education for people with disabilities

The aim of this section is to study the impact on disabled students in higher education of being unable to enter school at the right age. Wang Hui is a student with visual disability who lives in a rural area. Her father regarded her as useless and did not enrol her in school. It was only at the age of 12 that she had the opportunity to enter a school for the blind. When she wanted to go on to senior middle school Wang Hui was already over 20 years old. By the time she completed high school and university she would have been nearly 30 years old. Because of this Wang Hui faced all sorts of pressures related to age, family and finance.

Zhao Gang is also a blind student facing similar problems to Wang Hui on account of age. When Zhao Gang was at primary school it was evident that his age did not match the teaching stages. The physiological and psychological changes at puberty caused much conflict between Zhao Gang and his class mates and the surrounding environment. Zhao Gang felt very shy amongst his classmates, who were younger than him. He was a 3rd year pupil but wanted to be a junior high school student. Zhao Gang skipped grades, overcame these conflicts and in the end entered higher education.

Li Feng is a student with a hearing disability. His parents attached great importance to his education. They sent him to an mainstream local school as well as a special education school. But the principal and teachers of the normal school refused

to enrol him and the local deaf-mute school also refused to enrol him because his language abilities were lower than other students with a hearing disability who were enrolled that year, and this would compromise the school's teaching progress.

The end of this chapter summarizes the discussion in the first part and discusses the three cases above and the relationship between the two-tier education system and higher education.

3.2 Chapter 5 Teachers in the two-tier education system

Tang Ding is a visually disabled student with an excellent academic record, but her teachers think that blind students can only study massage. The report uses Tang Ding's case to show that education in blind schools is totally oriented towards employment. Teachers do not attach importance to students' need to develop freely. They have extremely outdated ideas of visual disability and do not respect visually disabled students. This has had a negative effect on Tang Ding's psychological health. Teachers have not given sufficient support to Tang Ding's own dream to go to university.

Gong Leyan is a student with a hearing disability. When he entered mainstream primary school, to begin with his teachers took him seriously. But the teachers' support was spontaneous. The school lacked a support system for students with disabilities. Gong Leyan's study results were not good enough and so his teachers lost interest in continuing to help him. Gong Leyan gradually moved from sitting in the first row of his classroom to sitting in the last row, rarely attracting his teachers' attention.

In the cases described above, when teachers deal with disabled students, or have an outdated view of disability, or are unable to provide continued support for disabled students, on the one hand it shows a variation in the quality of teachers of disabled

students, and on the other reveals an educational environment that lacks systematic support. Students cannot hope to gain reasonable accommodation from individual teachers.

3.3 Chapter 6 Teachers in mainstream high schools

The report discusses three themes related to the problems that teachers give (disabled) students in mainstream high schools. The three themes include: teachers who lose credit with students, obstinate teachers, and passive teachers.

As a disabled student Xie Jiajia relied on her innate talent for playing the 扬琴 to enter a mainstream high school. While she was at school, she never had the opportunity to take examinations because she never had good support and reasonable accommodation from her teachers. The teachers had promised to give her reasonable accommodation but time and again they broke their promise to her and in the end she completely lost heart.

Su Ting is a student with a hearing disability. She told her teachers many times that she had hearing problems and that she couldn't hear clearly what they were saying. But her teachers never seemed to understand what she meant by a hearing problem and would insist that she should answer questions like everyone else. She couldn't hear what her teachers were asking her and would often feel really awkward. Especially during PE lessons, in a noisy environment, she was completely unable to understand her teachers' demands and as a result going to class produced psychological conflict.

Zhang Mou is a female graduate student at a university. In her studies, she had conflicts with her tutors who criticized her for suffering from a mental disorder. Zhang Mou said her tutor's harassment was unfair. The conflict between the two of them escalated and in the end had a social impact. The school authorities did not use

reasonable accommodation in the course of this issue and stubbornly used administrative measures to attack Zhang Mou. In terms of public relations, it was unprofessional.

The report analyzes these three cases and considers that in these institutions of higher education the lack of a dedicated professional department with responsibility for disabled student affairs led to the above-mentioned problems. Colleges of higher education did not understand the actual needs of disabled students and therefore were unable to respond to their needs using systems in place in the college.

3.4 Chapter 7 Examination Obstacles

This chapter describes and analyses cases of obstacles many physically disabled students and visually disabled students face in examinations. Wang Yugang's examination room was on the fourth floor. He got to the examination room with great difficulty a quarter of an hour after the exam had started. Six physically disabled students had difficulties with the physical inspection required for moving up to the next class. They also had difficulties with not being given enough time in the exam. He Youting is a visually disabled student. She applied to do the entrance examination for the mainstream high school examination for university, but was refused by teaching staff and the school admissions staff. In the end she failed to gain the opportunity to take part in the examination.

The report looks at examinations as a measure and symbol of the allocation of educational opportunities and educational resources. It is hoped that these different cases will show the urgent needs of disabled students for reasonable accommodation and the feasibility of providing reasonable accommodation in the present circumstances.

3.5 Chapter 8 Obstructions in living

This chapter deals mainly with the cases of Xie Jiajia and Wang Lin. Xie Jiajia encountered many obstacles in living independently at university. For example, the canteen, shower room, and notice boards were not designed as obstacle-free. Xie Jiajia's grandfather accompanied her in her studies at university and looked after her daily life. Her grandfather's presence in her life made some things easier for her but also created new problems. Her classmates couldn't understand her grandfather's dialect and they gradually drifted away from her. On the one hand, her teachers liked having her grandfather accompany her in her studies since it relieved the school authorities of their agreed responsibilities; on the other hand some staff clashed with her grandfather because he grandfather did not understand the school regulations and was only thinking of his grand-daughter.

Wang Lin is a student with a physical disability. Ever since he was young he was hailed as a model of one who was 'broken in body but firm of spirit'. But after he entered university, he encountered many obstacles. However, he never took the initiative to make demands on the school authorities. He believed that he should strive to overcome difficulties on his own because to make demands would place a burden on the school and on society.

The two cases show that the lack of reasonable accommodation for disabled students in higher education creates problems. Disabled students solve difficulties in their own ways and this often leads to new problems. The most important thing is to discuss the relationship between social mainstream ideology and the awareness of disabled students about their rights.

4. Part 3. Conclusion

This part is a summary of the background, theory and analysis of the two cases mentioned previously. The report considers that special schools are the main provision

in the present two-tier system education system for people with disabilities and the medical model is the basic view of disability, and that policy and law are not effective in banning discrimination on the basis of disability. In particular, the failure to ensure the principle of reasonable accommodation is the biggest obstacle that people with disabilities face in higher education.

Finally, the report makes three recommendations regarding the aforementioned problems:

1. Mainstream colleges of higher education should establish departments of disability affairs, open up all subjects to disabled people and provide an obstacle-free environment and fair opportunities for free development.

2. Inclusive education should be taken seriously; supervise the change in function of the special education structure; control the speed and scale of development of special education schools; and make the necessary knowledge and skills for education for disabled people become basic knowledge for all teachers.

3. Improve the system for every level and every kind of entrance examination.