

*The Courses on Inclusive Education in Departments of Early Childhood Education
in Taiwanese Universities*

Hsueh-Jung Liu, National University of Tainan, Taiwan

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Abstract

According to official statistics, more than 90% of the preschool-aged children with disabilities in Taiwan are placed in regular education classes in recent years. In the trend toward inclusive education, it is crucial for early childhood education majors to understand inclusive education and practice it. However, numerous studies have noted that preschool educators are not prepared to teach young children with special needs. The purpose of this study was to investigate the undergraduate courses on inclusive education offered by the departments of early childhood education in Taiwanese universities. This study investigated every department of early childhood education accredited for preschool teacher education by Ministry of Education in Taiwanese universities. Data were collected from the university course selection systems, and content analysis was applied to categorize the topics discussed. The results revealed that of the 12 departments investigated, 6 departments offered courses on inclusive education in school years 2012-2017. Each syllabus listed lecture as one of the pedagogies. Most of the topics covered in the courses were the definition of inclusive education, curriculum and instruction, history of inclusive education, and individualized education programs. To conclude, this study may be of importance in demonstrating the current status of the courses on inclusive education offered in early childhood preservice teacher education programs in Taiwan.

Keywords: department of early childhood education, inclusive education, undergraduate course

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Introduction

According to official statistics, more than 90% of the preschool-aged children with disabilities in Taiwan are placed in regular education classes in recent years (Ministry of Education, 2016). In the trend toward inclusive education, preschool programs need to be ready for inclusion, rather than young children with special needs having to meet certain entry criteria (Odom, Schwartz, & ECRII Investigators, 2002). Preschool educators is one of the elements involving in preschool programs. In Taiwan, preservice teacher education programs prepare general educators or special educators separately, and students who meet eligibility criteria generally receive a teacher's certificate in either general or special education. However, high-quality preschool inclusive education requires collaboration and teaming (DEC/NAEYC, 2009). In addition to equip early childhood special education majors with the concept of inclusion, it is crucial for early childhood education majors to understand inclusive education and practice it. However, numerous studies in Taiwan have noted that preschool educators are not prepared to teach young children with special needs (e.g., Hsu, 2001; Li, 2006; Wang, 2002).

Couse (2016) purposed that it is time to think about how preschool educators are prepared to support all children. The course on inclusive education serves as the foundation for early childhood education majors to work with young children with special needs in natural environments. It should be noted, however, that there have been few attempts to investigate the inclusive education courses in early childhood preservice teacher education programs in Taiwan. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to investigate the undergraduate courses on inclusive education offered by the departments of early childhood education in Taiwanese universities. The results of this study provide early childhood education field with accurate baseline data about the courses on inclusive education in Taiwan and serve as reference for instructors to design related courses.

Methods

This study investigated entire 12 departments of early childhood education accredited for preschool teacher education by Ministry of Education in Taiwanese universities. Syllabi of undergraduate course entitled "inclusive education" and "preschool inclusion" being offered by the above 12 departments of early childhood education in school years 2012 through 2017 were collected from the online course selection system of each university.

Of the 12 departments investigated, 6 departments offered a total of 35 undergraduate courses on inclusive education in school years 2012 through 2017. Deducting duplicate, blank or incomplete syllabi, entire 9 undergraduate course syllabi were then analyzed. Content analysis was employed to understand how the undergraduate courses on inclusive education were offered. Open coding method was used to formulate coding categories. Relevant data were coded based on keywords. In addition to general information (i.e., course credits and course type), each syllabus was analyzed to identify what pedagogies were used and what topics were covered in the courses.

Results

The results revealed that of the 12 departments investigated, 6 departments offered courses on inclusive education in school years 2012 through 2017. Of the above 6 departments, 5 departments made the course on inclusive education as an elective course, and one department made it as required. 5 departments offered the courses for 2 credits, and one department offered for 3 credits.

Pedagogies

Every instructor used several pedagogies as noted in each syllabus. Every instructor planned to lecture in the course, along with other pedagogies including discussion, field experiences, case method, multi-media teaching, cooperative learning, commentary, and collaborative teaching with practitioners. Table 1 ranks pedagogies listed in course syllabi based on frequency.

Table 1
Pedagogies Listed in Inclusive Education Course Syllabi (N = 9)

Pedagogies	%	(n)
Lecture	100.00%	(9)
Discussion	77.78%	(7)
Field experiences	77.78%	(7)
Case method	55.56%	(5)
Multi-media teaching	44.44%	(4)
Cooperative learning	44.44%	(4)
Commentary	11.11%	(1)
Collaborative teaching with practitioners	11.11%	(1)

Course Topics

Several topics related to inclusive education were outlined in each syllabus. The topics included two dimensions: foundations and practices. Most of the topics covered in the courses were the definition of inclusive education, curriculum and instruction, history of inclusive education, and individualized education programs. Table 2 ranks course topics covered in course syllabi based on frequency.

Table 2
Topics Covered in Inclusive Education Course Syllabi (N = 9)

Topics	%	(n)
<i>Foundations</i>		
Definition of inclusive education	100.00%	(9)
History of inclusive education	77.78%	(7)
Characteristics of inclusive education	55.56%	(5)
Laws on inclusive education	44.44%	(4)
Rationale for inclusive education	33.33%	(3)
Current status of inclusive education	33.33%	(3)
Future development of inclusive education	11.11%	(1)
<i>Practices</i>		
Curriculum and instruction	88.89%	(8)
Individualized education programs	66.67%	(6)
Collaboration	55.56%	(5)
Teachers' preparation	44.44%	(4)
Transition	44.44%	(4)
Characteristics of young children with special needs	33.33%	(3)
Introduction to classroom management	33.33%	(3)
Learning environment design	33.33%	(3)
Supportive services	33.33%	(3)
Assessment	22.22%	(2)
Behavior management	11.11%	(1)

Conclusions

Based on the results of this study, there are some guiding questions to reflect: (1) In the trend of inclusion, shall the course on inclusive education be made as required? Are 2-credit-hour courses long enough to compass inclusive education? (2) Are the pedagogies used by the instructors suitable for equipping students with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed to work in inclusive settings? (3) Do the course topics represent a holistic scope of inclusive education?

In the trend of inclusion, it is crucial to equip early childhood education majors with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed to work with young children with special needs in inclusive settings. The results of this study provide accurate baseline data about the courses on inclusive education in the departments of early childhood education in Taiwan and serve as reference for instructors to design related courses.

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