



A Four Country Comparison: Special Education in the United States, China, India and Thailand

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ABSTRACT

There are few systems of special education that are as comprehensive as the one in place in the United States. This paper compares the special education services available to students with disabilities in China, India and Thailand with the services for students with disabilities in the United States. The first part of the paper is a review of the literature on special education in the aforementioned countries. This is followed by a survey conducted in 1st through 5th grade classrooms in each country. Results show while the United States has by far the most uniform and comprehensive service, followed by Thailand with progressive services in their university demonstration schools. China and India, however, have little in place to assist struggling students in their highly populated classrooms.

Keywords: Comparative special education; inclusion; special education in Asia.

1. INTRODUCTION

Obtaining services for students with special needs has historically been a challenge. The United States is an example of one of the most comprehensive systems of special education, while other countries have evolving systems for serving students with disabilities. This paper compares the special education “systems” of the United States, with the way that services are provided in the developing nations of China, Thailand and India. A survey is

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conducted comparing the support that “struggling students” receive in the aforementioned countries.

1.1 Special Education in the United States

Since 1975, and advent of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act [1] the United States has guaranteed a *free* and *appropriate* education for all students with disabilities. Under this act, there are 13 recognized categories of disability, and they are autism, developmental delay, visual impairment, hearing impairment, emotional disturbance, traumatic brain injury, language and speech disorders, deaf-blindness, multiple handicap, physically handicapped, mental retardation, other health impaired and specific learning disability. Of these categories, by far the highest percentage of students are those with learning disabilities [2].

There is a very uniform process in which struggling students in the United States are identified as qualifying for special education services. An assessment plan is sent home to obtain parents' permission to assess their child. Once the parent signs the form, and gives consent, the school has 60 days to do all of the testing and have a meeting on the results. After testing has been completed, an Individualized Educational Program (IEP) meeting is held.

At the IEP meeting, the testing results are presented to the members of the IEP Team. This team consists of an Administrator (Principal or Designee), school psychologist, special education teacher, the parent of the child, the school nurse, and other personnel when appropriate (such as a counselor or behavior therapist if the child has serious discipline issues or a language and speech (LAS) specialist if the child has articulation or language processing issues). The assessment reports of the school psychologist, special education teacher, school nurse, and LAS (if necessary) are presented. The first thing that is decided is whether the child has a disability and qualifies for special education services. If the child is found to be eligible, an IEP is written for that child. The IEP consists of several parts: goals, services provided, related services if necessary, accommodations and/or modifications, assistive technology, transportation, extended school year and transition (if the child is age 16 or older).

The services that are provided as a result of the IEP are extensive. Academic and/or functional goals are developed for the student, taking them from their present level of performance to at least one year's growth in that area. The student is placed in their *least* restrictive environment (LRE), as close to their same age peers as possible while still being able to receive an appropriate education. For some students, the LRE is the general education classroom with support from a special education teacher. For other students who are considerably below grade level academically, the LRE might be a segregated special education classroom on the site of the public school. For still other students, the LRE might be a mixed placement in which the child spends all but an hour or two in a general education classroom, but goes to a resource room for pull-out services in areas of need.

The child might also require related services to progress academically and/or socially. These services might include counseling, adaptive physical education (for those with fine motor or gross motor issues), speech, occupational therapy, vision and/ or hearing services. No matter what disability the child has, he or she is entitled to an education that is adequate for progress to occur.

A child is also entitled to necessary academic accommodations and/or modifications, both for instruction as well as when it comes to high-stakes testing. An accommodation is something that is provided the child but does not invalidate the test results. For instance, children with vision issues can be provided tests in larger print. Sometimes, however, it is not appropriate to only provide a testing accommodation. Some children need modifications. An example would be testing a 5th grader using a 3rd grade test.

Some students need appropriate assistive technology to progress academically, and this is also written into a child's IEP. An obvious example of assistive technology would be a Braille reader for a child with a visual impairment. However, it might be something as simple as a Hoyle Gripper [3], a device put on a pencil to help children with fine motor issues.

Another area addressed at IEP meetings concerns transportation. When a special education service is necessary but not available at a child's neighborhood school, the district will provide transportation for the child to a school with that service. Sometimes a child will be picked up at his or her neighborhood school, transported to another school, and then transported back to the neighborhood school at the end of the day. Other times, if appropriate, and usually when a child has a more involved disability, a child will be transported from their home to another school and back home at the end of the day.

Some children qualify for Extended School Year. When it appears that having a child be away from school for the entire summer would cause a regression of skills, perhaps due to memory issues, they are entitled to having their IEP services for a portion of the summer months. In the United States, it is typical for a child with a learning disability to receive services for half a day for about six weeks of the summer.

Finally, for a child 16 years of age or older, transition must be addressed. Goals are constructed for the child to prepare them for a vocation or, in some cases, college. They might be taught work skills or, if appropriate, independent living skills.

The student's IEP remains in effect for one year. At least once a year, the IEP is reviewed to determine if changes need to be made to the child's educational program. Parents are given progress reports several times during the school year (at every grading period) detailing how the student is progressing on his or her special education goals.

Every three years, the student must be reevaluated to determine if he or she is still eligible for special education services. This involves having the school psychologist and special education professional complete the same testing again. However, the IEP team may decide, after the second year, that the child's eligibility is unlikely to change and that reevaluation is not necessary.

The special education process for struggling students in the United States can be a cumbersome exercise, with much paperwork to keep in order to stay in compliance with existing laws and regulations. However, it has ensured a consistency across the country with regard to the services provided.

There is a remarkable consistency in which special education is implemented in the United States. This is due to the very prescriptive law governing special education in the United States, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 [1]. Services are quite similar no matter where one attends school, whether that school be urban or rural, largely middle class or largely poor.

1.2 Special Education in China

Special education in China is quite similar to what the United States looked like, with regard to special education, prior to implementing the Education for All Handicapped Children Act [1] in 1975. The only thing consistent about their system is the *lack* of consistency, from school to school, city to city, and province to province.

People knowledgeable about special education in China refer to the foundation of the People's Republic of China in 1949 as the start of special education services in that country. At that time, schools for the blind and deaf were founded [4]. However, it wasn't until 1980 that teacher training for special educators began, and until the 1990s when teacher training institutions were required to offer special education courses. Prior to this time, children with mental retardation and children with motile disabilities were largely excluded from school due to lack of personnel and resources, and children with other types of disabilities (i.e., learning disability, autism) were not even recognized as having a disability [5]. By 1987, only 55% of students with disabilities were in school compared to a national enrollment rate of 97% [6].

There were some important laws that have influenced the evolution of special education in China. In 1982, the newly revised constitution of China stated the country's responsibility for educating people with disabilities, the first legal mandate for the provision of special education in China. However, the firm foundation did not come until the National People's Congress adopted the 1986 Compulsory Education Law of the People's Republic of China [4], mandating that all children are entitled to nine years of free public education—six years of elementary education and three years of secondary school education. Special schools were organized for children with visual, hearing and mental impairments. In 1990, the Law on the Protection of the Disabled Persons (1990) was passed, and emphasized that families, work units and community organizations must share the responsibility for caring for individuals with disabilities. In 1994, this law was strengthened by the *Ordinance of Educations for Persons with Disabilities* which required a qualification certificate system for the special education teacher [5]. Furthermore, the 1993 Teachers' Law of the People's Republic of China [7] and the Education Law of the People's Republic of China [8] both call for offering educational undertakings for individuals with disabilities.

As a result of the previously mentioned laws, and the obvious western influence over time, the face of special education in China is much different today. China is attempting to do much more in the way of educating children with disabilities. China recognizes, by law, six classes of disability: visual, hearing, intellectual, physical, psychiatric and multiple impairments. Surprisingly, the prevalence of people with disabilities appears to be lower in China than other countries. However, this difference might be due to the fact that China does not recognize all of the categories of disability that other countries do, such as Learning Disabilities [4]. In addition, China is an agriculturally based culture and the majority of people live in rural areas. Physical labor is the primary work in these rural areas where people can function productively even if they cannot read or write. Therefore, many people with disabilities (e.g. autism, learning disabilities, and mental retardation) may not even attend school in rural and remote areas [4].

Because most of China's population lives in rural areas, the cost of funding special schools for most children with disabilities in these areas is quite prohibitive. Influenced by the trend toward inclusion in western countries, the "Learning in the Regular Classroom" (LRC) movement gained popularity in the early 1990s [9]. The use of this setting to serve students with disabilities has grown astronomically. In 1990, there were 105,000 students with

disabilities in school and about 18% of them were placed in general education classrooms. In 2003, LRC programs served approximately 67% of all students identified with disabilities in regular schools [5].

Children with disabilities are now welcome in Chinese general education classrooms; however, services are at best inconsistent. Eligibility for the LRC placements consists of those students who can adapt to studies and life in public schools. At present, three categories of disability are being served in the regular education setting: visually impaired, hearing impaired, and mental retardation. The most notable achievement made by China's LRC programs is the significant increase in numbers of enrolled children with disabilities.

Still, China has several major hurdles to overcome. First is the reality of large class sizes. Typically classes have between 40 and 75 students thus making it extremely difficult to individualize instruction for those students who need it. Additionally, teacher training is problematic as well. Many teachers in ordinary schools have never had training in special education [4]. Students with disabilities are often ignored in the classroom and may not receive appropriate instruction, because the teachers have neither enough time nor adequate knowledge to help them [5,10].

Several challenges face Chinese special education early in this 21st century. For one, the whole-class teaching model has long been dominant in the Chinese classrooms. This model was effective in teaching the information found in the textbooks to students in the prevailing overcrowded classrooms. This type of instruction was believed to better prepare students in the stiff competition for grade promotion and limited college entrances, however the challenge remains for ways in which to address learning diversity under this teaching uniformity and to practice individualized teaching for those students with disabilities [5]. There is a lack of instructional quality and accountability with regard to students with exceptional needs.

The achievement of students with disabilities has not been required to be included in official program evaluations, as it is in the United States, and no specific evaluation procedures have been developed. In some "Learning in the Regular Classroom" schools, students with disabilities have been observed sitting alone, isolated from classroom activities, or have even remained at home, despite the fact that their names are on the registration list. This unfortunately common practice has been called "drifting in the regular classroom" [11].

There are problems with the procedures used to identify and diagnose children with disabilities. There is a lack of diagnostic technology and experienced professionals. Many of the instruments used are inaccurate translations of commonly given Western instruments such as the Stanford Binet Intelligence Scale IV, or the Draw a Person Test, which are usually administered to determine whether a child has mental retardation; no attention is paid to adaptive behavior [11,4]. In fact, there is a shortage of school psychologists in China who are trained specifically to give these instruments [4].

Teachers are especially challenged in China's system. In the United States, special education teachers are more likely to be trained through university diploma/degree programs or continued education system in a more systematic and carefully designed way than in China [5]. Furthermore, the task of implementing special education services in China is daunting. Even in the United States, with class sizes about half that of typical Chinese classes and with a paraprofessional or a second teacher assisting in inclusive classrooms, the smooth and full implementation of inclusion is still a challenge. Teachers seemed to have

a much heavier instructional and management workload than their counterparts in the United States because paraprofessionals or teacher assistants are not employed, thus further challenging the implementation of individualized instruction [9]. Additionally, because of the highly competitive system of promotion by examination, educators in China are often faced with the push for higher promotion rates into colleges, while simultaneously addressing the needs of their students with disabilities. Within this competitive environment, teachers may not have enough time, energy, or professional knowledge to help students with special needs in their classrooms [12].

Another challenging factor concerns transportation. In addition to the financial constraints, transportation has been an influential factor. Inconvenient transportation has meant that it is much more feasible for a child with a disability to attend a local general education school than to attend a centrally located special school even if placement at the special school would be more appropriate [6].

Finally, teacher training for special education in China is lacking. Even when training exists, it is noted that an understanding of theory is more highly valued than student teaching competence, and that special education student teaching experience often lasts only about four weeks [9], compared to an entire semester in the United States. That said, most Chinese teachers receive no training in special education. In 1991, it was estimated that even if the existing teacher-training institutes could double their graduation rate, it would take more than 1,000 years to educate enough teachers to meet the needs of just the students with mental retardation [11].

With all of the challenges listed, the future is still brighter for children with exceptional needs in China. Teachers are being trained in more flexible methods, and in addition to the traditional whole-class lecture model of instruction, a model that combines whole-class teaching, tutoring outside of class, and cooperative learning has been widely applied and is strongly recommended to all teachers participating in "Learning in Regular Classroom" programs [11]. Additionally, parental advocacy is on the rise in China. In the United States, the advocacy efforts of parents (including litigation) were a main factor in bringing about a system of free and appropriate public education, including education in inclusive settings, for children with disabilities. Today in China, parents are beginning to request the same services that parents in the United States demanded more than 25 years ago—the right to an appropriate education for their children of different abilities [6]. Finally, programs to prepare special education teachers are developing rapidly [9].

1.3 Special Education in India

India is the largest democracy in the world with an estimated population of 1.21 billion. With a diverse population to cater to, the education system has had many phases of development, and the most recent phase is the movement towards inclusion. Nearly 60 years ago, India made a constitutional commitment to provide free and compulsory education to all up to the age of 14. Many disabilities have been recognized and there are now laws on special education for the disabled; most notably the Persons with Disabilities Act of 1995 [13]. However, there are many issues that affect the field of special education, and the way underachievement is confronted in Indian schools.

In India, the implementation of education laws is not consistent among different states, because the individual State Governments interpret these laws differently and implement them differently. For example, at one end of the spectrum, there is the state of Kerala with

practically every child completing elementary schooling and transitioning to secondary school, and every school having at least five classrooms and five teachers. And at the other end, there is the state of Bihar where only 50% children go to school. The majority of children entering school fail to complete the elementary school cycle, many schools are understaffed and teachers are undertrained and given very little academic support to perform their role [14].

Out of approximately 200 million children of school-going age, (ages 6 to 14), an estimated 80 million children are found not attending school. It is not known whether some of these children are being homeschooled, or if they are not receiving any education or instruction at all. Children who live in the educationally lowest performing states, are found to be more likely not to have any access to education at all, whether school or otherwise [15]. According to the 2001 Census data, 2% of children in the age group of 6 – 14 have special needs [16]. It is estimated that around 38% of such children are out of school.

The Persons with Disability Act of India 1995 [13] classifies disabilities as: visual, hearing, speech, loco-motor or mental. Learning disabilities (LD) are included under the category of 'mental', thus associating LD with mental retardation and mental illness [15]. Surveys conducted by the National Center of Promotion of Employment for Disabled People (NCPEDP) revealed that only 1.2% of persons who are disabled in India have had any form of education. In a school-level survey, NCPEDP found that of 89 schools, 34 did not have a single student with a disability and unfortunately, 18 schools had a policy against giving admission to children with disabilities [17]. Even when a previously excluded child is given access to a mainstream classroom, what happens within that space can be anything but inclusive, if the school quality is poor, they cannot access an inflexible curriculum or they are going to be ignored or bullied by the teacher and/ or peers [15].

From the population of school-going children, an estimated 14% of children have learning disabilities in India [17]. Underachievement in elementary level children in India is found to be mainly related to poor socioeconomic background, lack of facilities at home and in school, and school-related functioning of the underachievers themselves. Another factor is that in India, the national average teacher-pupil ratio is 1:42 [14], thus inhibiting meaningful individual interactions between teacher and student, thus contributing directly to the underachievement and high dropout rate in the lower primary grades.

In India, inclusive education is a recent phase of the education system. The adoption of inclusive education was found to be partly related to government pressure, partly to middle or upper class parental pressure for their own children with disabilities to be educated in the mainstream, and partly due to the need of private schools to be seen as innovative in a highly competitive market [15]. The implementation of inclusive education is sporadic and not standardized across the school system. Some sure signs of the sporadic implementation of inclusive education are that disability budgets remain under-used in many government programs and jobs reserved for disabled persons remain unfilled because of a shortage of qualified candidates from that category [15].

As a measure to address underachievement in schools, The National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) was established by the Ministry of Human Resource Development of the Government of India in 1989. This organization seeks to provide an alternative, and less challenging form of education for those performing below grade level, and to provide education inexpensively to remote and rural areas. This facility is also available for those

living in urban areas. However the objective is to provide education as a welfare measure to underachievers, rather than raise the skill levels of those children to perform at grade level.

In India, teacher education emphasizes developing teachers' awareness of children with disabilities, and how to 'diagnose' them, rather than how to include such children in the classroom [18]. Studies on teacher behavior show that teachers are not adequately trained to modify their behavior towards underachieving students. These studies show that although there are steps being taken towards inclusion, much remains to be done to address the needs of children who underachieve in class. While there are laws to address special education, there are many inconsistencies in the way those laws are interpreted.

1.4 Special Education in Thailand

Historically, educational services for children with disabilities were provided by Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). The first special school for the Blind was established in 1939. Other children with disabilities were still rejected from school. That meant they stayed at home and did not have an opportunity to go to school like peers without disabilities. Not until the 1950s did the government first fund special schools for children with visual, hearing, physical, and intellectual impairments. Since then, children with disabilities have had an opportunity to be educated in these special schools. In the 1990s, an increasing number of children with disabilities who needed educational services has led to a significant change in government supports to individuals with disabilities. The Rehabilitation of Disabled Person Act of 1991 [19] was passed to protect the rights of persons with disabilities. It is the first Thai law specially targeted to provide greater participation, and equality of persons with disabilities. These persons are eligible to receive appropriate basic education, occupational education and higher education based on the national education plan.

The rights of persons with disabilities were strengthened and expanded with the National Education Act (NEA) of 1999 [20]. This act requires that all Thai citizens shall have equal rights and opportunities to receive at least 12 years of a free, quality education provided by the government. Public schools are mandated to provide free education for students from kindergarten to high school. This provision makes "Education for All" available in Thailand. The National Education Act of 1999 makes clear reference to children with disabilities as well.

In 2008, The Education for People with Disabilities Act [21] was enacted. It is the most important law for children with disabilities ever passed in Thailand. Under this act, children with disabilities have the same right to education as children without disabilities including educational materials, facilities, assistive devices, and home schooling at no cost supported by the government. It is also illegal for parents to *not* enroll their child if their child is at age of seven or older.

In order to receive special education services, each child with disabilities needs to be registered and assessed. In Thailand, this is done by family physicians, as opposed to school personnel. Then, an Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) is developed according to the child's strengths and needs. The EPDA specifies nine categories of disabilities including (a) Physical impairment, (b) Visual impairment, (c) Hearing impairment, (d) Intellectual disabilities, (e) Emotional and behavioral disorder, (f) Multiple disabilities, (g) Autism, (h) Learning disabilities, (j) Speech and communication disorder. Children who fall into at least one of these categories are eligible to receive special education services. Although the

legislation is enforced, it has been difficult for schools to implement all substantial changes to the education system in all areas of the country.

Schools must now provide for children with disabilities by (a) Allocating a budget for schools to provide services and purchase materials for children with disabilities, (b) Requiring teachers not to refuse to teach a child with a disability, (c) Supporting well trained personnel to teach children with disabilities, (d) Providing effective instruction to children who are eligible for this service, (e) Implementing an IEP for each child, (f) Funding a center to improve assistive technology and software for children with disabilities, and (g) Strengthening policy of integrating children with disabilities within regular schools [21].

The Ministry of Education is the major organization to ensure that education is provided to all children in Thailand. Its Bureau of Special Education Administration (BSEA) takes charge in providing services for children with special needs across the country. Since the idea of moving towards inclusion gained recognition in 2004, the ministry has provided various types of schools to serve children with disabilities including (a) Special education centers, (b) Special schools, and (c) Regular integrated primary and secondary schools [22]. Additionally, there are 76 Special Education Centers (SEC) across all provinces in Thailand. The SEC is responsible for all special education services including identification of children with disabilities in the community, collaboration with parents, child assessment, IEP development, school placement, and early intervention at home or at the SEC. By law, all children with disabilities are able to receive education in the general education curriculum in regular schools upon parents' request. A school must complete an IEP, or refer a child to be assessed by the SEC. Funding is provided to schools only when the IEP has been approved. Not only responsible for providing services for children with special needs in the school settings, the SEC also searches for out-of-school children with disabilities in order to provide appropriate services as well as provide trainings such as 15-day training sessions for parents whose children have disabilities. However, the SEC has also encountered major challenges for not having sufficient qualified personnel.

Special schools are also provided for children with several types of disabilities including children with visual impairment, children with hearing impairments, children with mental retardation, and children who have behavioral and emotional disorders. In accordance with the NEA 1999 and 2002 regulations, the number of special schools especially for children with mental retardation and other types of disabilities has gradually increased. In 2004, there were 43 special schools for children with mental retardation, hearing impairment, and autism run by the Ministry of Education across the country. Also, these regulations resulted in a remarkable increase in the number of children and youth with disabilities being educated in regular schools through efforts of parents, professionals, educators, and other advocates.

1.5 Purpose of Study

Due to differing contexts and laws, it is difficult to compare the "systems" of special education in the United States, China, Thailand and India. However, one can look at how "struggling students" are served in their general education classrooms in the countries studied. Some students might receive some help in the general education classroom (inclusion), while others might receive help through a "pull-out" model. Moreover, many struggling students receive little if any help. The goal of this study is to look at the variables of class size, inclusion and pullout in the countries studied.

2. METHODS

A survey was conducted in two Chinese elementary schools, two Thai elementary schools, two Indian elementary schools, and three elementary schools in the United States. First through fifth grade teachers participated voluntarily and were asked the following survey questions:

How many students are in your class?

Does an expert come into your class to assist you with struggling students?

Do struggling students leave your room for help from an expert in a "special" room?

3. RESULTS

While results of this survey can only be generalized to this limited research sample, China and India had much higher mean class sizes than did the United States and Thailand. The Tukey test for results shown in Table 1 indicated that the difference in mean class size between China and India (59.46 vs. 58.24) was not significant, $p=.881$. The difference in mean class size between China and Thailand (59.46 vs. 29.85) was significant, $p<.001$. The difference in mean class size between China and United States (59.46 vs. 22.62) was significant, $p<.001$. The difference in mean class size between India and Thailand (58.24 vs. 29.85) was significant, $p<.001$. The difference in mean class size between India and United States (58.24 vs. 22.62) was significant, $p<.001$. The difference in mean class size between Thailand and United States (29.85 vs. 22.62) was significant, $p<.05$ (see Table 1).

Table 1. Mean class size by country, standard deviation and number of classrooms

Country	M	SD	n
China	59.46	8.42	26
India	58.24	3.21	17
Thailand	29.85	2.85	13
United States	22.62	2.65	26

Note. The difference among the four means (59.46 vs. 58.24 vs. 29.85 vs. 22.62) was significant, $F(3, 78) = 282.93, p<.001$

The United States had by far the highest percentage of classrooms studied implementing inclusion, with 73.9% compared to 46.2% for Thailand. None of the Chinese or Indian classrooms included in the survey had any implementation of inclusion (see Table 2).

Table 2. Number of classrooms by country, percentage implementing inclusion

Country	Number of Classrooms	Percentage Implementing Inclusion
United States	26	73.9%
China	26	0%
India	17	0%
Thailand	13	46.2%

Note. The difference between the four percentages (73.9 vs. 0 vs. 0 vs. 46.2) was significant, chi-square (3, N=82) = 36.83, $p<.001$

As far as the implementation of pullout, 88.5% of the United States classrooms used this technique compared to 53.8% usage in Thailand. None of the Chinese or Indian classrooms included in the survey had any implementation of pullout (see Table 3).

Table 3. Number of classrooms by country, percentage implementing pullout

Country	Number of classrooms	Percentage implementing pullout
United States	26	88.5%
China	26	0%
India	17	0%
Thailand	13	53.8%

Note. The difference between the four percentages (88.5 vs. 0 vs. 0 vs. 53.8) was significant, chi-square (3, N=82) = 56.64, $p < .001$

As far as the implementation of either inclusion or pullout, 100% of the United States classrooms used either or both of these techniques compared to 53.8% usage in Thailand. None of the Chinese or Indian classrooms included in the survey had any implementation of inclusion or pullout (see Table 4).

Table 4. Number of classrooms by country, percentage implementing inclusion and/or pullout

Country	Number of classrooms	Percentage implementing inclusion
United States	26	100%
China	26	0%
India	17	0%
Thailand	13	53.8%

Note. The difference between the four percentages (100 vs. 0 vs. 0 vs. 53.8) was significant, chi-square (3, N=82) = 68.57, $p < .001$

3.1 Limitations of Study

Although there is widespread evidence of large class sizes across the continent of Asia, this cannot be verified through various ministry of education websites. Therefore, results of this study must be limited to the samples surveyed.

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

It was first intended that this be a paper comparing the special education systems of the countries under study, but that proved quite difficult as the United States was the only country with a highly consistent, regulated system. China, India and Thailand had "pockets" of progressive special education, but there was no uniformity from city to city, or urban to rural regions. So, one could only look at how teachers in these various countries were supported in their efforts to teach "struggling students". Moreover, statistics on class size, staffing and staff qualifications are not available on the Thailand, China and India ministry of education websites, so one can only compare the schools in the study sample.

The United States has a system in place in which identified students with disabilities are provided the special and related services that they need to progress academically. In China

and India, teachers deal with very large class sizes, and there is no support personnel that assist with them, whether it be in a general education classroom (inclusion) or a special education classroom (pullout). Thailand is different. In Thailand, progressive special education exists in about 20% of their schools; specifically those schools that are attached to universities as “demonstration” schools.

To conclude, the developing nations of China and India are at the stage where awareness of the needs of individuals is beginning to occur, and the prospects for the future are promising. Thailand, on the other hand, is farther along as there are examples of progressive special education spreading throughout the country. The prospects for individuals with disabilities in these countries are, indeed, improving.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Author has declared that there are no competing interests.

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