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All Students Are Worthy:

A Comparison of Special Education Within Countries

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**Introduction**

Consider this situation: It is the 1800's and there is a girl named Megan who is born with high spectrum autism. Megan is told from the day she was born that she is worthless, her life has no value, and she is not capable of anything. When she is out in the streets, she is abused, and when she is home, she is physically abused by her family. Her mom especially tells her daily she is a disgrace to the family. One morning when she wakes up, Megan is thrown into a dusty, old, worn out mental institution for a physical disability she is born with and not because she is any harm to society. Megan is considered to be a financial and psychotic burden to the family. With no hope or encouragement from anyone around her, she accepts that she has no purpose in the world.

Dating back to the 1800's, people with a disability have been thrown into mental institutions, beaten, abused, and underestimated. For those with a disability, having an opportunity to be educated was not thought possible. They have been deemed as unqualified or not worth the time to educate. It was not until the late 1960's into the early 1970's that parents and others started advocating for equal rights. Since this time, countries around the world are attempting to fix the inequalities of people with a disability by creating laws to allow for them to gain an education and create hope for their future. No country has a perfect system, but all countries are finding ways to help people with a disability reach their full potential. The United States has created the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) to meet the needs of students with a disability and Germany has created the Social Welfare Code IX (SGBIX) which forbids discrimination against physically disabled individuals. Unfortunately, there are still countries, such as China, India and Africa, that still lack ways to protect students with a

disability. Special education has become more common and prepares more students to succeed over the past century, but there is still a lot of improvement that needs to be made to continue to increase success for people with a disability.

### **Comparison of Special Education in Different Countries**

Since the 1800's, countries have started to create laws to protect students with disabilities. According to Jeffrey Kritzer (2012), the United States started in 1975 when they created the Education for All Handicapped Children Act. This act guarantees free and equal education to all who have any type of disability whether that be physical or intellectual. The United States also created the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 1997 in order to improve the Education for All Handicapped Children Act. According to IDEA (1997), written by an unknown government author, all children must have equal access to public education but also to require special services that meet their needs and prepare them to either continue their education or get a job and live on their own after graduation.

Many other countries are starting to adopt the same types of laws in order to improve special education in their country. Worrel and Taber (2009) state in 1986, the National People's Congress in China passed the Compulsory Education Law that states all children have the ability to get nine years of education. Much like the United States, China has since improved their special education laws to now offer special programs to help meet the needs for people with a disability. Thailand, the program most like the United States, passed their first law protecting student rights in the 1950's but it only protected students who were blind. Since then, their laws have improved significantly. Within the Education for People with Disabilities Act (2008), it

states all children with disabilities have access to equal education including educational materials, buildings, and assistive devices at no cost. After comparing the laws from three countries, they all have a main goal of giving access to education for children with a disability. But, the difference between the laws of different nations are great.

Although all of the laws have a common goal of creating equality, they all approach it in different ways. According to IDEA in the United States, all students with a disability are allowed to have access to an individualized education plan (IEP). This plan is specialized to the student needs and creates accommodations to allow the student to gain as much success as possible. Although all countries would love to follow this consistency with all students, most have not achieved this level of consistency yet. Countries such as China and India have such a high population density that it would be unreasonable to enforce having IEP's. It is not feasible for teachers to be able to work with students individually because there are too many of them and not enough time. Developing countries such as Zimbabwe, according to Mpofu and Molosiwa (2017), approach special education in a community approach rather than an inclusion approach. The main difference between the United States and most other countries is the United States requires education for all students whereas most other countries state that everyone is allowed an education but it is not required.

The classroom styles are vastly different within different countries. One big difference within all countries is classroom size. A study done by Kritzer (2014) claims that the average class size in China is 59 students. In India the average class size is a little lower with 58 students. Both Thailand and the United States have a drastically lower number of students in their classes with Thailand at 30 students and the United States at 23 students. The amount of students within

a classroom significantly impacts the education of all students, especially students with disabilities that need extra accommodations.

Another difference is the implementation of inclusion within classrooms. Most countries have some sort of inclusion within their special education programs. The same study done by Kritzer (2014) states “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” (p. 3379).

Inclusion within the classroom leads to high success in social growth for the students. They need to have the time in the classroom to learn how to interact in a “normal” society. It teaches the students social skills that cannot be taught but instead needs to be learned through experience. Having inclusion and IEP’s within an education system prepares students for life after high school but if society does not accept them then that leads to another battle they have to face.

The way the culture views people with a disability directly affects the way that their special education is set up and how much effort they put into it to make it successful. A study done by Ncube and Hlatywayo (2014), a lecturer and chancellor at Zimbabwe University, found that parents were mainly involved in the administrative issues rather than making educational decisions that were best for their child that had a disability. If the parents do not have a strong and positive view of their child with a disability, then it is hard to get the rest of society to advocate for children with a disability. The same study goes on to state “there are challenges faced in the recruitment of specialist teachers; shortage of trained teachers; refusal by trained teachers to teach special classes; centralized recruitment system; and poor incentives” (Ncube & Hlatywayo, 2014, p. 72). In Zimbabwe, people with a disability seem to be a burden so teachers

are refusing to teach these students. Even the teachers who are educated to teach these students refuse to do so. This cultural view is a big reason that special education is not good in Zimbabwe. China is also having this same problem.

In China, children face discrimination within their school system for special education. In an article written by Human Rights Watch (2013), a mother reports that the main schools deny many students from admission into their school, ask them to leave, or fail them in all their classes so they are forced to drop out. Students with a serious disability are excluded and receive no education at all. They are excluded because of the perception people with a disability have from society. If society found them worthy, they would put more effort in including them in their education. Going back to inclusion, in order for China to improve this aspect of their education they need to first recognize their right to education. The views of people with a disability within the United States and Thailand have drastically changed to a more positive view.

Within the United States population, 26% of people are living with a disability according to an infographic made by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) in 2019. Within Thailand the percentage of people living with a disability is only 3%. Regardless of the percentage, both countries recognize the impact that people with a disability have on their country. Many are extremely intelligent and can learn things or know things quicker and more in depth than a person without a disability. They often lack the social skills they need in order to achieve these high level jobs. This is the main reason that the perception has changed. The United States, especially, has realized the potential people with a disability and found that their special education programs need to prepare their students academically but also socially.

## **Analysis**

There are many things that make a special education program successful. First, it is the use of inclusion, also known as putting students in a least restrictive environment (LRE). The U.S. Department of Education explains that LRE means that schools have to educate their students within the special education program in a regular classroom to the maximum extent that is appropriate. The main purpose of inclusion is to have the student alongside their nondisabled classmates in a classroom that they would be in if they were not disabled. Supplementary aids and support systems are used to help the child so they can sustain being in a classroom. The length of time differs with every student. Some students can sustain a longer period of time within the classroom without getting distracted or without distracting the other classmates and others have to work up to that point. All students have the capability to get to be in a classroom for a long period of time, but depending on their disability, it may be a little more challenging. A study done by Hasazi, Johnston, Liggett, and Schattman (1994) looks at the different use of inclusion by looking at eight schools who were high users of inclusion and 10 schools who were low users. They found that the schools who were high users led to more students going on to higher education and more success later in their jobs. Although there were many factors that determine high versus low user sites including finance, organization, knowledge, and values, this shows the importance of inclusion within special education programs to lead to success. Having inclusion also allows relationships to be built with the teachers.

Making connections with the student is another thing that builds up the success of a program. An article written by Draper (2019) shows research findings that show collaboration

leads to higher teacher efficiency with the child, higher enjoyment of the environment by the students, higher overall success, achievement and participation. Building a relationship is not only beneficial to students with a disability, but it is beneficial to all students. Any student who has a positive relationship with their teacher is going to have higher rates of success and enjoy learning the content more. The more of a connection that is made with the student, the better they can create an appropriate individual's education plan (IEP). Washington University (2020) writes that an IEP should include the involvement and progress of the child with a disability, all services that the student needs, necessary accommodations, current educational performance levels, and goals and objectives for the student's education. In order to know what appropriate service or accommodations the student needs in order to achieve the student's maximal extent, the teachers need to know the students on a relational level. The closer the teacher is with the student and knows them as a person, the better the goals are going to be for the student. It will also lead them to a better understanding of how to appropriately and effectively discipline the students within a classroom setting. Although there are many other things that lead a program to high success, inclusion, having a personal relationship with the students, and the use of an IEP is what makes a program successful.

## **Discussion & Conclusion**

Because of many different factors, the United States is the country with one of the best special education programs and is used as a model for other countries. The reason that the United States is a model for other special education programs is because of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act which supports inclusion in the classroom and Individualized

Education Plans. The base of the programs in the United States is built off of each individual and this is not the case in many other countries. Not any two students with a disability will have the same exact education plan because their education plans are made to fit them. The ability of the United States to have the smaller classroom sizes allows the teachers to make meaningful connections with their students. Countries such as China and India are limited because they do not physically have enough time in the day to meet every student's needs. Although the United States has improved their program significantly, there are many things that can be done to improve all programs across the world.

First, in order to improve programs all countries need to find experienced teachers. Teaching special education is different and oftentimes more challenging than teaching an average classroom. Children within these programs can be hard to understand and not able to understand how to correctly behave in a “normal” setting. Every country is at a low of finding teachers willing to teach special education. Next, researchers found that many children with a severe disability learn how to interact by social interaction teachings instead naturally learning overtime. Many programs across the world have not added these teachings within their curriculum. Although programs are improving this by including inclusion as a requirement, the program can keep improving by actually teaching students how to interact. Lastly, the biggest thing programs across the globe need to improve on is the transition after high school. Even if the country is privileged enough to let people with a disability get a high school degree, there is often a lack of preparing them for life outside of school. The majority of students have the capability of living on their own eventually but they need to be prepared for it. They need to be taught how to get and sustain a job in order to pay for their rent and necessities. Most of all, they

need to be taught how to do the daily essential things such as get groceries. Teaching these life skills is the biggest thing almost all special education programs lack. If programs are not educating the students how to live after high school and use what they have learned, then what is the purpose of educating people with a disability?

As a whole, special education has improved greatly, but there is still a lot of improvement to be made. Some countries have to improve more than others in order for students to achieve the maximum success. As a society, views of people with a disability are starting to be seen as worthy and valuable. Remember Megan? If she had been born in today's world, her life may have been much different. She would have probably had the opportunity to be educated from a young age. The more that people realize people with a disabilities potential, the better they will be educated.

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