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Research Snapshot No. 15

“How is inclusion defined at the early childhood level in China, Germany, and the UK? A systematic literature review”.

A paper published in 2024 in the International Journal of Early Years Education (Tan et al.)

In the spirit of reconciliation PRECI acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of country throughout Australia and their connections to land, sea and community. We pay our respect to their Elders past and present and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples today.



John Forster (BA Hons)
CEO, Noah's Ark Inc

What you need to know

- + This article explores how inclusion in early childhood is defined and implemented
- + It is concerned that a lack of clarity leads to confusion in terms of both how to operationalize the concept of inclusion and how to study it in a consistent way.
- + It focuses on the experiences in China, Germany, UK (England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland) as a way to explore these issues.
- + It uses a helpful framework for increasing understanding: Access, Acceptance, Participation, Achievement (Ainscow et al., 2006; Artiles & Kozleski, 2016)

What is this research about?

- + How early childhood inclusion is interpreted and translated in the three target counties, starting from their social histories and concepts of social cohesion.
- + Using a review of relevant literature, the experiences of inclusion in the three countries is explored within a four-dimensional framework: access, acceptance, participation and achievement
- + The similarities and differences in approach across the countries is compared.
- + The discussion raises concerns about tokenism, where preconceptions of who should be eligible for support limits the full benefits of an inclusive approach, with a call for a principled approach.

What did the researchers do?

- + Systematic literature review covering the years 2000 to 2020
- + Inclusion criteria: empirical studies, discussed the concept of inclusion, specifically addressed early childhood education in China, Germany, and the UK.
- + Exclusion criteria: not published in peer-reviewed journals, did not address perceptions or definitions of inclusion
- + Final selection: 5 articles from China, 4 articles from Germany, 6 articles from the UK.
- + Three researchers independently coded full texts for data relevant to the research questions and identified common themes and points of comparison based on the framework: access, acceptance, participation, achievement.

What did the researchers find?

- + Findings did not apply equally to all countries studied.

Access Dimension

- + Children's access was categorised into four areas: physical environments, activities within program design, curriculum and assessment, qualified professionals
- + Limited access to activities and programs widely reported
- + **China and UK:** limited access to curriculum and assessment
- + **UK:** lack of access to qualified professionals

What did the researchers find?

Acceptance Dimension

- + Children with special education needs and those from immigrant backgrounds often not fully accepted
- + In some settings, children with disabilities were more accepted than immigrant children, potentially based on physical appearance and mother language
- + Acceptance often based on specific needs (e.g., speech development, severity of condition)
- + Key questions raised: “Who is eligible for inclusion?”, “Who does inclusion apply to?”

What did the researchers find?

Participation Dimension

- + ***China and Germany***: lack of children's participation in classroom activities, instruction, and play
- + Parental involvement valued, but largely excluded from decision-making and social participation

Achievement Dimension

- + ***China and UK***: focus on academic achievement, limited attention to children's social and emotional development

What did the researchers find?

Conclusions

- + Definitions of inclusion were often narrow
- + Emphasis placed on individual deficiencies rather than broader contextual or systemic factors
- + Inclusion frequently linked to disability, with preconditions for participation

Interview with Dr Run Tan



How can you use this research?

- + The framework of access, acceptance, participation, achievement allows a deeper understanding on inclusion and comparison across countries.
- + For example, in Australia there are strong narratives about access and participation, but less focus on acceptance and achievement.
- + Australia can be seen to have a broad, principled understanding of inclusion which recognises children with a range of additional needs, including disabilities, and children from a range of backgrounds, including First Nations children.
- + However, children with disabilities access to professional staff, for example, can be questioned.

Where to from here?

- + Early Childhood Australia and Early Childhood Intervention Australia (n.d.)
Position statement on the inclusion of children with a disability in early
childhood education and care.
https://www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/ECA_Position_statement_Disability_Inclusion_web.pdf
- + Warren, J., Soukakou, E. P., Forster, J., Ng, L. T., & Nteropoulou-Nterou, E.
(2021). Small steps: the inclusion of young children with disabilities in
Australia, Greece, and Malaysia. *Australasian Journal of Special and Inclusive
Education*, 45(2), 164–177.
- + Kemp, C. R. (2016). Early childhood inclusion in Australia. *Infants and Young
Children*, 29(3), 178–187. <https://doi.org/10.1097/IYC.0000000000000062>

About the researchers



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Tan, R., Devarakonda, C., & Rothe, A. (2024). How is inclusion defined on the early childhood level in China, Germany and the UK: a systematic literature review. *International Journal of Early Years Education*, 1-20.

THANK YOU FOR LISTENING!