

# Family Support Situation and Educational Strategies for Primary School Children with Intellectual Disabilities Learning in Regular Class

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**Abstract:** This paper aims to verify the family support situation for primary school children with intellectual disabilities learning in regular class and to explore various educational strategies to promote their development. A self-made questionnaire was used in this survey, and the parents of 380 intellectual disabled students were the subjects of this survey. It turns out that the overall family support for intellectual disabled children learning in regular class in China is good, but it is affected by the degree of obstacles. Factors such as grade, gender, and parental education had no significant effect on family support. It is the shared responsibility of the government, schools, and parents to promote the level of family support. Governments at all levels must implement family support projects, schools must carry out family education guidance to impart scientific parenting knowledge, and parents must take note of their own responsibilities, so as to promote the physical and mental development of children with intellectual disabilities.

**Keywords:** Learning in regular class; Children with intellectual disabilities; Family support

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## 1. Research question

Inclusive education is the development trend of special education. Against this background, China implements learning in regular class, which combines the western integrated education with the reality of special education in China, so that children with special needs can receive compulsory education in ordinary primary schools. This embodies a pragmatic integrated education model <sup>[1-3]</sup>. Children depend on family environment, as a component at the micro level, for their survival and development. The level and status of family support not only affect the quality of life of children, but also their mental health, behavioral performance, and academic performance <sup>[4-6]</sup>. Individual development refers to the interaction of individuals with various environmental systems, in which family support has a significant impact. Family support, in this study, refers to the fact that children with intellectual disabilities receive positive support from their families to enhance their adaptability and well-being in the face of pressure and setbacks <sup>[7-10]</sup>. The Family Education Promotion Law that has been put forward by the People's Republic of China emphasizes the significance of family education and highlights the importance of family support. The financial support, encouragement, information support, *etc.* that parents provide to students with disabilities

affect their development [11–13]. Some of the family support for children with special needs is embodied in the support given by the outside world to the parents on educational behavior [14,15]. Improving the quality of support within the family is critical to the development of children with special needs. It has been reported that family support is mainly for children with autism [16]. In China, intellectual disability is the category of disability with the largest number of special children, and the largest number of children with special needs in regular class in primary schools are in fact children with intellectual disability.

## **2. Research methods**

### **2.1. Research subjects**

The parents of children with intellectual disabilities who are learning in regular class in primary schools in Guangdong Province were the research subjects. Among the 380 questionnaires, 75 questionnaires were invalid, thus removed. The effective recovery rate was 80.3%. Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) 22.0 was used to analyze the data in this research.

### **2.2. Research tools**

The *Family Support Questionnaire for Children with Intellectual Disabilities in Primary Schools Learning in Regular Class* is a self-compiled copy used in this research based on the interviews with parents of children with intellectual disabilities and special education experts. The questionnaire consisted of two parts: basic information, including gender, grade, level of disability, and parental education, with a total of 4 items; and three dimensions of emotional support, with a total of 15 items. The questionnaire was scored on a five-point Likert scale, with 1–5 representing “Completely Disagree,” “Basically Disagree,” “Uncertain,” “Basically Agree,” and “Completely Agree.” The higher the score of each dimension, the higher the degree of family support. Upon testing, the internal consistency coefficient (Cronbach’s alpha) of the questionnaire was 0.844, and the correlation coefficient between each dimension and the questionnaire was between 0.680 and 0.798, which can be considered as a moderate degree of correlation; the reliability and validity of this questionnaire were considered good.

## **3. Results and discussion**

This study used the mean and standard deviation of the scores of the parents on the subscale and the total scale to determine the family support situation for primary school children with intellectual disabilities who are learning in regular class.

### **3.1. Analysis of the overall family support for primary school children with intellectual disabilities who are learning in regular class**

The average total score of family support for children with intellectual disabilities learning in regular class was 4.08; the averages of the three dimensions were 3.99, 3.96, and 4.25, which were higher than the theoretical average – 3.00. This shows that the family support for primary school students with intellectual disabilities learning in regular class is good, with emotional support having the highest average and informational support having the lowest average. The results are consistent with the study done by Hoagwood [17], which suggests that family support is a service that provides cognitive, emotional, and spiritual support to children, making them more dynamic and better attuned to developmental issues [17].

### **3.2. Analysis of family support for primary school children with intellectual disabilities learning in regular class under different backgrounds**

#### **3.2.1. Grades**

Through independent sample *t* test, there was no significant difference in the overall family support and

support for each dimension among students of different grades ( $p > 0.05$ ). The findings of this study are inconsistent with those of Zhang Xiulian and Li Jiarong <sup>[18,20]</sup>. Zhang Xiulian found that the grade of primary school students has a significant impact on parent participation <sup>[18]</sup>, while Li Jiarong found that there are significant differences in the family support received by ordinary primary school students of different grades and primary school students in resource class <sup>[19]</sup>. The subjects of this study are students with mild and moderate intellectual disabilities. Perhaps due to their own lack of intelligence and social adaptation, they require continuous family support, especially self-care and academic supports, thus resulting in no significant difference in family support for students of different grades.

### 3.2.2. Gender

There was no significant difference in the overall family support and support for each dimension among students of different gender ( $p > 0.05$ ). The findings of this study are consistent with those of Li Jiarong, which revealed that gender did not significantly differ in parental support for students in primary resource class <sup>[19]</sup>. However, this study is inconsistent with the findings of Chen Shuyan and Zhang Xiulian. According to the study done by Chen Shuyan, there were significant differences in the family support of junior high school students due to different genders <sup>[20]</sup>. However, the subjects of the study were junior high school students, whereas those of the present study were primary school students. Zhang Xiulian found that the gender of primary school students had a significant impact on parent participation, in which girls were better than boys <sup>[18]</sup>. Both, boys and girls with special needs have similar needs due to disabilities. Due to the limitations in intelligence and social adaptation among those with intellectual disabilities in learning in regular class, the support provided by families primarily focuses on these aspects; hence, there was no significant difference in the family support of students with intellectual disabilities of different genders to a certain extent.

### 3.2.3. Degree of disability

There were significant differences in the overall support, information support, and substantive support with different degree of disability, as shown in **Table 1**. There were significant differences in the overall family support for students with different levels of disability ( $p < 0.01$ ). The overall family support, substantive support, and information support received by students with mild intellectual disabilities were significantly better than those received by students with moderate intellectual disabilities. There were no significant differences in emotional support ( $p > 0.05$ ). These findings are consistent with those of Li Jiarong, which revealed significant differences in family support among primary school resource class students with different levels of disabilities <sup>[19]</sup>. For students with mild to moderate intellectual disabilities, families need to provide emotional support; due to different degree of intellectual disability, students with mild intellectual disability in primary schools need more support in their studies, whereas students with moderate intellectual disability may take up life adaptation courses. There are different courses for students with mild and moderate intellectual disabilities, and these students require different supports.

**Table 1.** Analysis of variance (ANOVA) of family support of students with different degree of disability

Type of support	Group	Number	Average	Standard deviation	F value
Information	Mild	172	12.40	1.847	4.057***
	Moderate	133	11.39	2.348	
Substantive	Mild	172	24.30	3.855	2.661**
	Moderate	133	23.10	3.962	

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Type of support	Group	Number	Average	Standard deviation	F value
Emotional	Mild	172	25.76	3.147	1.383
	Moderate	133	25.22	3.633	
Whole family support	Mild	172	62.45	7.085	3.126**
	Moderate	133	59.71	8.206	

Note: \*\* $P < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $P < 0.001$

### 3.2.4. Parental education level

There was no significant difference in the overall family support and support for each dimension among students with different parental education levels ( $p > 0.05$ ). This is inconsistent with the research done by Chen Shuyan and Li Jiarong. The study done by Chen Shuyan found that there were significant differences in the family support of junior high school students due to different parental education levels [20]. The study done by Li Jiarong had similar findings even when conducted among primary school resource class students [19]. The reason for this may be that the researchers selected a large number of samples from rural areas. In addition, the education level of 57.0% of the subjects was of junior high school and below. Due to their low intelligence and social adaptability, intellectual disabled children require continuous family support, especially self-care and academic supports. Hence, no significant difference was found in terms of the family support given to children by different parental education levels.

## 4. Conclusion and educational strategies

### 4.1. Conclusion

There are three conclusions in this study.

- (1) For primary schools children with intellectual disabilities learning in regular class, they have good family support, and they receive emotional support the most.
- (2) Among grades, genders, and parental education levels, there were no significant differences in the overall family support, information support, substantive support, and emotional support.
- (3) There was no significant difference in emotional support based on the degree of disability; however, there were significant differences in overall family support, substantive support, and information support by the degree of disability, whereby students with mild intellectual disabilities received better support than students with moderate intellectual disabilities.

### 4.2. Educational strategies

- (1) For government departments, this subject should play a role with the help of the State and society in arranging labor, life, and education for the blind, deaf, dumb, and other disabled citizens, as stipulated in the Constitution of the People's Republic of China [21]. Government departments should provide financial support to carry out parental support programs for children with special needs, so as to help these children adapt to the society. The Family Education Promotion Law has defined family education support for normal children. Hence, the Law should also stipulate the intervention knowledge and skills needed by children with special needs. Parents should be required to participate in the educational placement of intellectual disabled primary school students and the formulation of individualized education programs (IEPs).
- (2) For schools, the survey has revealed that the education level of parents of intellectual disabled children is generally low. Through parenting education, it is possible to change the educational concepts among parents and enhance their knowledge and skills in raising and educating children with special needs. Schools can hold parenting education courses to strengthen parents' role awareness, teach pedagogy and

psychological knowledge related to child development, hold regular parent-child activities, and promote home-school cooperation.

- (3) For parents, in the current information age, a lot of information support is needed in order to help these children adapt to the society. This study found that the parental education level is relatively low; hence, parents need to improve their own learning ability and actively learn knowledge related to the pedagogy and psychology of children with special needs. In addition, based on the degree of disability, parents must provide appropriate support to improve their children's school adaptability.

In general, the parental support for primary school children with intellectual disabilities who are learning in regular class is acceptable. However, there is no significant difference in family support for children with intellectual disabilities who are enrolled in the same class by grade, gender, and education level, which reflects a need for improvement in the current family support situation. Future research should focus on other children with special needs.

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The author declares no conflict of interest.

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