IMPROVE EFFICIENCY IN SPECIAL EDUCATION SCHOOLS' ADMINISTRATION OF GUIZHOU PROVINCE CHINA: TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP THEORY FOR SOLUTION

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According to existing research results, there are four types of contradictions and deficiencies in the administration of special education schools in China: a lack of professional talents in the administration of special education schools, a lack of service awareness and sense of responsibility among managers, an excessive use of administrative power, and an overstaffing of administrative institutions in special education schools. From the perspective of total leadership theory, this study suggests several recommendations for special education schools: "check and balance administrative power," "update management concepts and transfer administrative power to the center," "simplify administrative institutions and improve administrative efficiency," and "establish a scientific evaluation system and mechanism for teachers and workers in special education schools".

Keywords: special education; special education school; administration; transformational leadership

Introduction

The development level of special education can not only measure the education level of a country but also reflect the progress of social civilization. Vigorously developing special education is not only the embodiment of China's people-oriented scientific outlook on development but also an important way to promote educational equity. Since the Special Education Promotion Plan (2014-2016) issued by the Ministry of Education and other seven departments in 2014, special education schools have obtained more independent administrative power, which is of great significance to the development of special education in China. Nowadays, China's special education has made great progress and has become an

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important part of national education, and its related legal and policy system is becoming more and more perfect.

The number of special education schools began to grow rapidly in recent years and showed a rising trend. According to the statistics of the Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China (2021), the number of special education schools in China will reach 2,244 in 2020. According to the Bureau of Statistics of Guizhou Province (2021), taking Guizhou Province, a province in Southwest China, as an example, there were 77 special education schools in Guizhou Province in 2020. As an important part of special education, special education schools have special research value.

The administrators of special education schools should not only complete their own administrative work but also create a good teaching and learning environment for students and teachers through their efforts. To achieve the goal of administrative management and creating a good teaching and learning environment, administrators should do the corresponding administrative work, select appropriate administrative means according to the actual situation and system, give full play to the administrative responsibilities to the greatest extent, and realize the desired goal of the school.

On the one hand, scientific and effective administration should regulate the behavior of school managers, teachers, and special children, solve the practical problems in the teaching process, and ensure education and defect compensation for special children.

On the other hand, administrative management provides institutional and policy support for the development of special education schools, stimulates teachers' enthusiasm for teaching, ensures the healthy growth of special children, and obtains the maximum output with the minimum input. It can be said that the administrators of special education schools are in the position of both managers and service providers.

Without effective administration, the work of special education schools will fall into disorder, and the growth of special children will also be affected. Although some reforms have been carried out in special education schools, such as the implementation of the principal responsibility system and the full implementation of the teacher appointment system, some problems have also been exposed when the expected objectives have not been achieved. These problems restrict the long-term development of Chinese special education schools.

In the research on the administrative management direction of Chinese special education schools, Shi (2019) studied the driving force and resistance causes of the reform of the special education administrative management system. At the same time, he also studied the problems existing in the administrative management of special education schools and proposed solutions.

However, the researchers did not find a similar study in the database that puts forward solutions from the perspective of total leadership theory according to the problems existing in the administrative management of special education schools in Guizhou Province, an underdeveloped province in Southwest China.

Therefore, this study will propose solutions to the problems in the administration of special education schools in Guizhou Province from the perspective of total leadership theory.
Contradictions and deficiencies in the administration of special education schools

Special education schools will have a variety of problems and deficiencies in the actual process of school administration. According to the research of Chinese researcher Qin (2018), in recent years, China's special education schools have four contradictions and deficiencies in administrative management: "Lack of professional talents in the administration of special education schools", "Lack of service awareness and sense of responsibility of managers", "Too extensive use of administrative power" and Overstaffed administrative institutions of special education schools.

Lack of professional talents in the administration of special education schools

The team members of special education schools lack professionals in the field of special education. For example, in eight special education schools in Guiyang, Guizhou Province, there are only a few individuals with a background in special education and management among the administrative leaders. In these schools, most of the teaching staff are recruited from society without a professional background in special education, and there are only a few teachers with specialized training in this area.

Additionally, the school administrative team, although having previously held administrative positions such as president, consists mostly of older individuals who may struggle to keep up with modern advancements. Some administrators in non-urban areas even lack the ability to operate computers due to outdated administrative systems (Zhang, 2013; Qin, 2018).

As a result, administrators lack professional experience in special education, which makes it difficult to effectively carry out their work in special education schools. Many tasks are handled based on their own administrative experience in regular schools. Finding competent administrators for special education schools is a challenging task.

Managers lack the overall service awareness and sense of responsibility for special education schools

Li (2010) argues that China's special education schools did not adopt a scientific approach to administrative management and did not effectively implement the designated system in their day-to-day operations. The main objective of administrative management in special education schools should be to support teachers and provide assistance to children with special needs. Rather than prioritizing the role of administrative managers as high-ranking officials, the focus should be on creating a platform for the development of teachers and special children.

Unfortunately, many special schools are still trapped in traditional management thinking. These managers perceive themselves as the central figures in special education schools and expect teachers and students to comply with their administrative requirements. However, they fail to adapt effectively to the changes occurring in special education, resulting in a lack of quality services for teachers and students. Consequently, this leads to wasted teaching resources and decreased educational efficiency.

In terms of personnel management systems, special education schools primarily focus on managing teachers but overlook the importance of recruiting and utilizing individuals with a background in special education. Additionally, they also fail to address the loss of teachers, particularly those with expertise in special education.

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The unique characteristics of special children require special education schools to focus on motivating teachers and encouraging them to invest wholeheartedly in teaching, regardless of the challenges they may face. The current management and operational approach primarily emphasizes administrative bodies and their power.

Due to the nature of their students, teachers in special education schools often struggle to see tangible results, which can lead to complacency. Furthermore, this management system tends to foster a stagnant mindset, discouraging progress and even prompting some teachers to leave special education schools. Therefore, special education schools should adopt a macro-level approach in school administration to stimulate teachers' sense of ownership.

**Generalization of internal administrative power in special education schools**

In China, most special education schools belong to public schools, and China's public schools are similar to other state institutions in administration. Kou (2006) believes that Chinese institutions tend to rely on administrative power in the process of administrative management. For schools located in provinces with lagging economic development, the administrative standard is more prominent and the academic standard is less prominent. The administrative standard for special education schools refers to the power of the administrative departments and personnel in school administration, mainly seen in the authority of personnel such as principals and grade directors.

In China, the reality is that most special education schools are led by personnel with teaching titles rather than administrative backgrounds. However, the power exercised by these individuals in administrative roles is still administrative power. Special education schools receive authorization from the higher education competent department for their administrative power. Administrative personnel have significant resources at their disposal, and teachers rely on them for teaching and other business demands.

However, when frontline teachers provide input on various aspects of the school, their opinions are often not taken into account. The value and purpose of special education schools lie in teachers' education and services for special children, as determined by the development principles of special education. If the administration of special education schools prioritizes compliance with administrative power rather than the development of teachers and special children, it will diminish the status of teachers and hinder the progress of special children. The overemphasis on administrative power often leaves many teachers in special education schools feeling marginalized.

**The expansion of the administrative institutions of special education schools**

The establishment of administrative institutions and personnel in special education schools is primarily based on the establishment of institutions and personnel in government organs. Therefore, it is similar to the situation in government organs. Despite undergoing multiple streamlining processes, the administrative department of special education schools continues to expand. As more administrative departments are created, the functions become more detailed, resulting in an increase in staffing and auxiliary personnel.

Uniquely, each special education school in China has a large number of party and government management personnel in addition to the administrative personnel, other management personnel, and auxiliary personnel, which do not occupy limited post resources. The quota of special education schools is not effective in restricting the growth of
administrative institutions. Many special education schools hire a significant number of temporary workers when faced with a shortage of teaching auxiliary personnel. Consequently, the issue of overstaffing worsens.

This not only increases interference in the management process and decreases school administration efficiency but also disrupts the primary work of the school.

Furthermore, Guo (2002) argues that special education schools in China have a strict hierarchical system. Party and government leaders, along with principals with Chinese characteristics, hold the highest level, followed by middle-level managers, and then teachers who enjoy similar treatment at their respective levels. Party and government leaders and principals with Chinese characteristics wield significant power within the school, making it resemble a centralized organization.

The higher the administrative level, the greater the status, authority, and privileges. This situation greatly undermines the motivation of teachers.

Put forward the countermeasures that special education schools can implement in the process of administrative management through the perspective of transformational leadership theory

The perspective of transformational leadership theory

Sergiovanni (2009) pointed out that principals shoulder the important responsibility for the success or failure of school management. How to lead school members to make changes to quickly adjust and respond to social needs, in order to enhance the school's competitive advantage and achieve sustainable operation and development, has undoubtedly become an urgent task for principals managing the school.

The term "transformational leadership" comes from the new concept of leadership proposed by Burns (1978), which emphasizes that in order to stimulate followers and achieve the goals of leaders and followers, transformational leadership is defined as leaders making employees aware of the significance and responsibility of their tasks, guiding deployment beyond individual interests, and improving the subordinate's level of demand and values for the expected results of work, thus improving their work motivation and enthusiasm to exceed expectations.

Fullan (2005) proposed five core principles for promoting change leadership, including:

(1) Moral purpose: leaders have a moral purpose, can help subordinates make transformations in direction, and are willing to solve difficult problems;

(2) Understanding Transformation: the characteristics of transformation are fast and non-linear processes, which may cause chaos but also provide opportunities to break the status quo or deadlock. Therefore, leaders should realize that change can only be understood or guided, but not completely controlled;

(3) Building relationships: leaders must be able to establish good relationships in the school, make subordinates promise to contribute to the success of the school, and fully utilize the talents of each member;

(4) Creating and sharing knowledge: change leaders need to build a model of knowledge sharing. To understand the knowledge in organizational transformation, we should create, establish, share, and manage it;
(5) Making coherence: leaders must understand that short-term change does not work, so they must pay attention to the consistency and integration of strategies and the establishment of self-management mechanisms.

Yukl (2013) proposed the principles of transformational leadership:

(1) Appropriate organizational actions: including identifying the resisters and promoters of change, forming alliances to support change, understanding and utilizing individuals effectively, promoting talented individuals capable of implementing change, using task grouping to guide the implementation of change, and controlling the process of transformation;

(2) People-oriented actions: this includes creating a sense of urgency for the need for reform, encouraging members to prepare for reform, assisting members in reducing the pain of reform, providing members with early opportunities for success, timely sharing progress and information on reform, continuously expressing support for reform, and increasing power and empowerment to assist members in implementing transformation.

Based on the above, the organizational transformation model generally includes changing the old business model of the organization and considering internal needs to formulate appropriate action strategies. In the process of operation, we should emphasize the consensus and cooperation of members to reduce resistance and opposition to change. Therefore, in all the processes of promoting school reform, leaders use various leadership actions such as stimulating motivation, creating a vision, communication and coordination, improving processes, and empowerment to lead school members in the dynamic process of planned transformation.

**Effectively check and balance the administrative power of special education schools**

In China, although special education schools are divided into managers and teachers, the difference is only in the division of labor, not in status. Special education schools are both institutions and cultural establishments. Their organizational form has distinctive cultural characteristics, which are different from the hierarchical structure of administrative organs. In the internal power structure and management system of special education schools, administrative power and academic power are inseparable organic components.

They complement each other and jointly serve the overall goal of special education schools. The pursuit of knowledge and the education of special children, which are the characteristics of special education schools, along with the attribute of teachers' creative work, determine that special education schools should have a parallel organizational structure. Both administrative power and academic power serve the group of special children, which is the starting point of the work in special education schools.

Therefore, the most effective way to improve the administrative efficiency of special education schools and effectively check and balance the administrative power of schools is to eliminate the hierarchical structure of special education schools, build a parallel organizational structure, and establish high reliability schools (HRS). The effective check and balance of administrative power in special education schools is essential for the good development of schools, and this is determined by the nature and functions of schools.

To change the generalization of administrative power in special education schools, principals should first establish the school as a high-performance professional learning community (PLC) and minimize the influence of administrative power as much as possible. Teaching and research offices of all grades and disciplines should cooperate independently,
allowing teachers to fully express their enthusiasm in teaching, strengthening their professional skills and emotional control, breaking the emphasis on bureaucratic positions, and enabling teachers to truly find their place in special education schools.

They should devote all their energy and love for children with special needs to the teaching of students in special schools. Secondly, special education schools should reduce intermediate management levels, decrease management positions, and establish a parallel organizational structure. The educational goal of special education schools is to serve special children and help them integrate into mainstream society. In order to accomplish this task, teachers in special education schools must have the freedom to think independently and create teaching methods and content for special children.

Therefore, if the bureaucratic hierarchy consciousness in special education schools is too strong, it will diminish teachers' enthusiasm for their work, and ultimately hinder the development of special children. Finally, the management of special education schools should increase transparency, abandon highly centralized individual rights within schools, and appropriately distribute power.

Managers should trust teachers, effectively distribute power among them, encourage their participation in school management, and make teachers true partners in the school, working together with school managers and students to build special education schools.

**Update the concept of administrative management and transfer the center of administrative power**

In the management mode of most special education schools in China, principals, as leaders, are used to unconditional obedience to power control and regard teachers as part of school assets rather than creative people. In the process of management, principals generally manage the school with a Chinese paternalistic management model. This runs counter to the core idea of "people-oriented" advocated in the field of education.

Therefore, principals of special education schools should abandon the working style of the Chinese paternalistic management model, add democracy and team awareness to the management of schools, no longer engage in administrative command management with highly centralized personal rights, fully trust managers at other levels in the school, and establish a sense of belonging for all members of the school.

Constantly improving communication channels among members will allow information to be transmitted smoothly in the school and efficiently achieve the teaching objectives formulated by all members of the special education school in combination with the requirements of the competent education department for students' academic achievement.

Secondly, the administrators headed by the president should increase their professional ability and improve their moral cultivation. Most special education school administrators have no professional background in the administration of special education schools, or even in the administration of schools. They do not have much knowledge of administration, especially in the administration of special education schools. Some managers are still used to the old administrative management mode, satisfied with manual or semi-automatic information collection, processing, and application, and do not know how to incorporate the latest "big data analysis" into daily school management.

Therefore, we should strengthen the continuing professional development (CPD) of school administrators headed by principals, especially in ethics for special children, the educational policies formulated by the state, and advanced administrative knowledge and
means. At the same time, a complete management mode should be adopted in the process of school management to clarify individual responsibilities in the school. Complete leadership means that the principal should not only continue to cultivate their professional ability but also provide "complete" and "active" effective leadership in the alternating implementation of inspection and guidance. Then, four principles of complete leadership are put forward: honest information communication, win-win interpersonal relationships, recognized power distribution, and selfless sharing of achievements and honors.

In the management of special education schools, administrative staff are required to do their work properly, identify various problems in the school in a timely manner, and correct and deal with them promptly. Information exchange should be conducted every week to address the work of the week, in order to correct deficiencies in the following work and achieve the sustainable development of special education schools. In other words, the complete management mode requires managers to excel in seemingly simple and easy tasks in order to improve management efficiency and reduce the administrative cost for principals.

**Streamline the administrative structure of special education schools and improve administrative efficiency**

Streamlining administrative institutions is a necessary step in improving the management efficiency of special education schools. If the administrative staff of a special education school lack a sense of responsibility or professional ability and are not competent in their own work, the school may need to adjust the positions of these staff members.

The staff of special education schools should be recruited based on the school's specific needs. In addition, a reward and punishment mechanism and a staff mobility mechanism should be established to allow administrative personnel to be moved based on their work performance. It is also important to establish a sound and effective reward mechanism, competition mechanism, and restraint mechanism to fully motivate administrative personnel.

Regarding teaching staff, we should optimize the structure of school administrative personnel according to the principle of "setting posts on demand, open recruitment, and employment based on merit". We should actively implement the full contract appointment system for management personnel and establish a flexible employment mechanism. This will enable administrative personnel to take initiative in their work and improve the efficiency of school administration.

**Establish a scientific evaluation system and mechanism for teachers and workers in special education schools**

Administrative personnel are an indispensable part of special education schools. Individuals with relevant abilities and a willingness to participate in management work should join the school's administrative team. The administrators of special education schools should establish a sense of belonging to the school as soon as possible with the assistance of the school. Therefore, the managers of special education schools should establish a scientific evaluation mechanism for all aspects of the school and increase the salary of administrative personnel according to their contribution to the school, as permitted by the policy.

In actual school administration, we should base our research on the nature, characteristics, and content of managers’ work. We should carry out qualitative and quantitative evaluations to objectively reflect their management ability. Therefore, in the actual management process, the administrative management system should be strictly
managed according to established norms, and the existing evaluation system should be scientifically and effectively improved. The evaluation feedback system should inform the evaluated administrative departments and individuals truthfully and regularly through formal documents. When faced with the evaluation results, the evaluated administrative departments and individuals are required to correctly consider the evaluation opinions.

At the same time, they can express their opinions on the evaluation results. These administrative measures are conducive to the stability of the administrative team of special education schools, attracting excellent individuals to join administrative roles in schools, improving the efficiency of administrative management, and realizing the personal value of administrative personnel.

**Conclusion and discussion**

Due to the obstacles existing in special education schools, the administrators of special education schools will invest more enthusiasm and energy in their school work than the teaching staff of ordinary schools, including administrators. They strive to understand students with the same psychology and provide a more suitable teaching environment and resources for school teachers and students.

In view of the existing administrative problems of the school, the administrators led by the president take the total leadership as the management theory. They propose that the administrators led by the president need to continue professional development (CPD) and continuously improve their ethics. This is necessary to complete the latest management concept and improve the school's administrative management system.

They aim to restrict the conflict between administrative power and academic power, listen to and collect the personal opinions of school staff in administrative management, and provide constructive opinions on the school's administrative management. Ultimately, their goal is to build a high-reliability school (HRS) and strive to make all departments in the school become a professional learning community (PLC). This is to fulfill the mission of special education schools in serving special children.

This study focuses on the deficiencies in the administration of special education schools. Although the administrative problems proposed in this study are common in most special education schools, similar problems not only occur in the administration of special education schools, but also in the daily administration of secondary technical vocational schools and universities in China (Liu, 2018; Wu, 2020).

Therefore, while this study offers solutions to the problems in the administrative management of special education schools in China, since there are similar problems in other schools, the proposed solutions can also be used as a pilot scheme in the actual management process of daily administrative management in schools facing similar problems. Moreover, in theory, the solutions applied to other schools, such as China's secondary technical vocational schools and universities, should have an equal effect in problem-solving as they do in special education schools.

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