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## How to improve the pre-school program? In the Case of China

**Abstract:** Since the 21st century, with the reform and comprehensive development of education, preschool education has gradually appeared in everyone's vision. In recent years, preschool education, as the foundation of lifelong education, has been highly valued and vigorously developed by the state. Preschool programs are also facing pressures and challenges. There are still many problems in the preschool education program. This article deals with how to improve the pre-school program, how to assess children's knowledge in the preschool program, how to make preschool programs work well, and so on. The authors will further analyze and discuss the improvement measures in all aspects of the preschool education program based on the actual situation.

**Keywords:** preschool education program; the need for preschool education; status of preschool education; assessment; recommendations for improvement.

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### Introduction

Preschool education is an important stage of children's learning and growth, the foundation of lifelong education in society, and the premise for the country to cultivate high-quality talents. Therefore, preschool education has been paid more and more attention by society and parents. In recent years, China has been vigorously developing preschool education, but there are still some issues that have not been resolved. This paper briefly analyzes the importance of preschool education and the current situation of preschool education and proposes corresponding improvement strategies.

Currently, many studies show that the assessment of the knowledge of students in the preschool group is accurate. The main purpose of the preschool class is to provide students with access to high-quality, developmental preschool programs that help prepare children for school. In addition, they will receive diet, physical activity, and health care; they need to arrive at school with a healthy mind and body (Lorrie Shepard et al., 1998).

There are some other studies in the United States of America that support the expansion of early childhood education. It is believed that quality early childhood education can help become more efficient and close the achievement gap. In addition, neuroscience has proven that there is a significant increase in brain function during the first five years. This growth forms the basis for later learning. According to policymakers, researchers, and teachers, the preschool education system should include several elements

such as the instructional framework, instructional materials, pedagogical approaches, student assessments, a system for teacher learning, school leader learning, and instructional oversight.

Instructional frameworks provide a vision for specific subject areas and guidance on what to teach and how to teach while the instructional materials and pedagogical approaches provide guidance on the scope and sequence of skills. Knowledge assessments track student progress in preschool and early grades. This leads to a determination of whether the policies they implement effectively contribute to the development of children and narrow the achievement gap. The next element of the framework is the system for teacher learning which includes professional training programs and coaching, as well as opportunities for teachers to meet with each other to discuss in professional learning communities what kind of program they have established in their preschool education. School leaders need to learn how to support the preschool classrooms and should be engaged with classrooms at their school site. They should address what is missing in the learning approaches and provide what is needed for learning. Instructional oversight is substantial as a tool to identify teacher learning needs and leaders should be always informed about issues in preschool in order to solve them in time and keep the process under control (PreK-12 Is the New Reality: How Do We Make It Work?).

XXI century skills such as collaboration, problem-solving, digitalization, and so on represent a bunch of competencies; these skills make young individuals become productive members of the workforce in the future (Larson & Miller, 2011; Rouse & Rouse, 2022). In order to improve the education quality, a recent study recommends taking the maker movement to school, which means when schools and educational institutions are integrated with each other and school-based maker spaces should be used with the widest variety of students (2012; Rouse & Rouse, 2022); they should not be selected to tinker them in after-school projects; it should be obligatory for every student and teacher should be trained to this operation, respectively. This process will lead to the creation of innovative projects focused on science, art, and technology (Dougherty). As a result, there raises to reconsider the activity creation to support young people learning. Due to its inconsistency, the development of constructivist ideas in the context of the development of pedagogical ideologies and technologies leads to the reconceptualization of the traditional model of education (Arpentieva et al., 2021). In the next subsections, the authors analyze how to improve the pre-school program in the case of China which has played a bigger role in improving pre-school programs due to its big number of young learners.

**Research questions.** This article seeks an answer to these questions: How to improve the pre-school program? How do assess children's knowledge in the preschool program? How to make preschool programs work well?

### **The need for the preschool program**

"A strong country must first strengthen education". As the foundation of lifelong education, preschool education is an important part of national education and the first stage of children's enlightenment. The value of the preschool program to individuals, families, and society is clear. Children in the preschool stage have just started their minds and have not yet established a correct outlook on life, society, and values. While they are curious about the things around them and also very easy to develop bad habits. At this time, it is particularly important to actively develop the preschool program. On the one hand, preschool education can develop children's intelligence and their ability to recognize things. Psychological research has shown that the development of human intelligence has a specific critical period. Generally speaking, the basic structure of the human brain will be completed before the age of 6. On the other hand, the preschool education stage is an important stage when children just begin to contact society and participate in interpersonal communication. Good preschool education can cultivate children in the collective to form a lively personality, solidarity, friendship, and helpful qualities. To cultivate children's self-reliance, self-improvement, and self-confidence in life.

In China there are 130 million infants and young children aged 0-6, accounting for 1/5 of the total number of children of the same age in the world. It is the country with the largest population of preschool education in the world. Therefore, vigorously promoting the preschool program is particularly important for our country. It can not only improve the basic quality of national individuals but also contribute to the cultivation of new talents in our country. In early 2010, the Chinese Ministry of Education announced the

"Outline of the National Medium and Long-term Education Reform and Development Plan (2010-2020)" (hereinafter referred to as the "Outline"), which pointed out that it is necessary to vigorously develop and popularize preschool program, improve the preschool program in rural areas, and improve preschool's educational mechanism (People's Daily, 2010). Despite this, there are still some problems in the development of the preschool program in China.

## **Main problems faced by the preschool program**

### **It is difficult and expensive to enter preschool**

First of all, as we mentioned before, the preschool education enterprise is part of the national education enterprise. But the real problem is that preschool education is not a part of the country's "compulsory education". Although China has been working hard to increase financial investment in preschool education in the past ten years, the total financial investment is still insufficient. The total investment in preschool education in EU countries accounts for an average of 0.6% of GDP, of which Iceland, Athens, and Norway all exceed 1.0%, Sweden has reached 1.4%, and this indicator in China is only 0.19% (Zhao Li, 2020). According to statistics, by the end of 2021, the number of public preschools in China accounted for 43% of the total number of preschools. The lack of public preschools has become the main reason for the difficulty in entering preschools.

When public preschools cannot meet the demand, many families have to choose private preschools. Private preschool tends to charge high fees. In recent years, some first-tier cities have even seen "sky-high prices of preschools" with annual fees of up to 100,000 yuan. The fees charged by a large number of preschools are beyond the affordability of ordinary residents, which has brought financial pressure on many families. At the same time, the scarcity and high price of preschools also lead to a lot of inequity.

### **There is a significant gap between urban and rural**

The gap between urban and rural preschool education is an important manifestation of inequity in preschool education. At present, only 70% of children in the vast rural areas of China can receive only one year of preschool education (Cai Yingqi, Feng Xiaoxia, 2004). The opportunities and years of education for rural children are far less than those of urban children. Not only that but the quality of preschool education in rural areas can't be compared to that in cities. As we know, the level of economic development in rural areas is low, the government invests less money, and Teachers are poorly paid. It has directly led to problems such as the poor environment of rural preschools, insufficient teachers, and outdated educational concepts in rural preschools, which also seriously affected the quality of rural preschool education.

### **Problems with preschool teachers**

1. The number of teachers is not enough.

As a basic discipline, preschool education has relatively short development history and has not attracted people's great attention. In addition, society does not fully understand the professionalization of preschool education teachers, which makes the status and economic benefits of preschool education teachers generally low, and there are fewer practitioners. According to the statistics of the Ministry of Education, in 2020, the total number of teachers and staff in preschools nationwide will be 5.1982 million, and the number of children in preschools will reach 48.18 million. Still not up to the 1:7 standards. Moreover, the total number of teachers and staff in rural preschools is less than one-fifth of the national total, and the ratio between urban and rural areas is seriously unbalanced (Research Institute, 2021).

2. The faculty structure is unreasonable.

Due to the increasing demand for teachers in popularizing preschool education at this stage, a few preschools only focus on the number of teachers and ignore their quality. Moreover, China's educational level requirements for preschool teachers are only technical secondary school and above, which is much lower than that of developed countries (Liu Huquan, 2022). Many preschools only require a junior high school degree when hiring teachers, and some preschool teachers have not obtained a teacher qualification certificate at all. Among them, some rural preschools or private preschools even recruit local unemployed residents as childcare workers to save costs. Preschool teachers seem to be reduced to a simple job that everyone can do, which makes it difficult to carry out educational activities that fully meet the needs of children's healthy growth.

3. Lack of appropriate educational theoretical guidance.

With the development of the times, education has undergone tremendous changes in recent years. This change is mainly reflected in the fact that young children can learn more new things through the Internet, which means that young children mature earlier than previous. Therefore, preschool teachers need to make corresponding adjustments in educational philosophy and educational purposes at the same time. Due to the particularity of preschool education, teachers need to have a variety of qualities such as love, responsibility, and patience. In the teaching process, teachers should not only carry out "imitation" education, but also need to follow the objective laws of children's physical and mental development to incorporate habit formation and character shaping into the scope of teaching.

#### **The tendency of "primary schooling of preschool education" is serious**

Chinese basic education has long been dominated by examination-oriented education, which has also had a great impact on the development of preschool education. In terms of parents, in order to make their children have a good future, many parents often take various methods to educate their children in advance. However, most of them only focus on the cultivation of intellectual education, while ignoring the education of other intellectual factors such as personality, emotion, physical and mental health, etc. In terms of preschools, many school-running institutions are driven by economic interests and only care about the interests of parents, taking reading, writing, and counting as the main activities. In particular, some preschools use primary school-like things such as teaching first-grade courses to attract parents to send their children to their preschool. This phenomenon not only deprives children of their nature but also runs counter to the goal of preschool education that emphasizes the cultivation of children's interests and hobbies, the emphasis on individualized growth, and the emphasis on harmonious all-around development proposed in the "Outline".

### **Necessary measures to improve preschool program**

#### **From the state and government's side**

##### **1. Popularize preschool education.**

From a global perspective, more and more developed countries and regions have public preschool education institutions accounting for more than 50% or even 100% (Li Yufeng, 2010). However, China's public preschool education institutions only account for 43%, which has not reached the level of popularization mentioned in the "Outline". This requires the state and the government to strengthen the construction of public preschools, build a number of public preschools, and continuously expand public preschool education resources by investing in new construction, rebuilding idle school buildings, or adding preschool classes in primary schools. Gradually form a public service system for preschool education with public administration as the main body. At the same time, relevant laws and regulations are issued for preschool education, so that education authorities and governments at all levels can formulate plans, systems, and measures to promote the sustainable, healthy, and scientific development of preschool education. The state should also include preschool education into the category of compulsory education as soon as possible, which is the only way to achieve universal preschool education.

##### **2. Vigorously develop rural preschool education.**

First, increase the state's investment in rural preschool education, and narrow the difference in terms of financial security. Establish a financial investment mechanism led by the government, supplemented by donations from social groups and individuals, and set up special funds for preschool education. These funds are mainly used to improve the conditions for running preschools in rural areas, reward towns, and towns that have basically universalized preschool education, and support poor rural children. Secondly, cultivate the teachers of preschool education in rural areas and narrow the differences in the teaching team. Establish a teacher allocation system that flows to rural areas, incorporate urban and rural preschool teachers into a unified system, and increase incentives for rural teachers to encourage more excellent teachers to participate in rural preschool education, balance educational resources, and improve teaching levels. Only with the joint development of urban and rural preschool education, education fairness can be achieved and the negative impact of unfavorable family education and growth environment be effectively reduced.

##### **3. Increase financial investment in preschool education.**

Public funding for preschool education is the basic guarantee for preschool education. The state should increase financial investment in preschool education and pass legislation to ensure financial

investment in preschool education. However, limited by China's financial system and financial capacity, under the existing financial system, China's financial investment in preschool education has an obvious "public preschool tendency" (Song Liqin, 2021). This requires governments at all levels to establish a preschool education funding guarantee mechanism based on the actual development of regional preschool education, incorporate preschool education funds into the government budget and achieve separate budgets; Education departments at all levels should strengthen supervision and evaluation to ensure that the allocation of funds to public preschools and inclusive private preschools is equitable in proportion, according to standards, and according to the system, so as to effectively utilize the benefits of financial funds.

### **From the preschool teacher team construction's side**

#### **1. Pay attention to the training of teachers.**

China has been training teachers through teacher education, which ensures the professional training of preschool teachers. However, taking normal education as the only channel for preschool teacher training limits the source and level of preschool teachers to a certain extent. By learning from some developed countries, China can also expand the source of preschool education teachers by combining targeted and non-targeted methods, but at the same time, it should also ensure the professional assessment of the appointment of non-targeted teachers. In-service preschool teachers should regularly receive on-the-job training, learn new ideas and methods, and explore new educational methods with the help of Internet resources. For those preschool teachers who have graduated from vocational middle schools or non-preschool education majors, carry out continuing education to improve their educational capabilities, including improving educational theory, literacy, and scientific research capabilities, and mastering education and teaching skills. In addition, the state should also pay attention to the guidance of social values, encourage male students to devote themselves to the cause of preschool education, and solve the problem of the lack of male preschool teachers.

#### **2. Focus on solving the authorized problem of rural preschool teachers.**

Each region should formulate policies to adjust the staffing of teachers according to the current situation of regional education. Narrow the gap between urban and rural teachers through measures such as job rotation and increasing income subsidies for rural preschool teachers, so that the preparation standards for rural preschool teachers meet the actual needs of local preschool education (Chen Fengmei, 2015). It is necessary to issue relevant laws and policies at the national level, eliminate the gap in the quality of preschool teachers in urban and rural areas, implement the qualification access system for preschool teachers in accordance with the law, and clarify the status of teachers. Priority is given to teachers who have obtained qualification certificates, and more teachers are encouraged to obtain qualifications to better improve their teaching level.

#### **3. Protect the interests of preschool teachers.**

On the one hand, the government should clearly stipulate the minimum wage standard for preschool teachers, paying particular attention to private preschool teachers. Ensure that teachers are hired by signing labor contracts, ensure that wages are paid in full and on time, and implement social welfare policies such as endowment insurance and medical insurance. Appropriately increase the authorized strength of private preschools, so that teachers who worked many years have the opportunity to "regularize" and relieve their worries. For rural teachers, there must be a certain policy preference, and subsidies for preschool teachers in remote areas and ethnic minority areas should be increased. On the other hand, schools and social groups should also care about the work, study, and life of preschool teachers, build a personal growth platform for preschool teachers, and respect preschool teachers. So that they can be more proud to give in the preschool education industry.

#### **4. Improve the personal quality of teachers.**

Preschool teachers should not only have excellent oral expression skills, but also skills such as singing, dancing, and painting. There are also two parts to improve the teaching level of teachers. One is to improve the knowledge reserve of teachers. Preschool education involves a lot of content. Children are always full of curiosity about the unknown world. Only with rich knowledge reserves can teachers guide children to build a better understanding of the world's scientific cognition. On the other hand, it is to improve teachers' observation ability. Children usually have difficulty expressing their demands in precise words.

Teachers should always observe children's behavior during the teaching process, and make effective responses without disturbing children's concentration. This requires preschool teachers to learn psychological knowledge.

### **From the preschool education teaching's side**

#### **1. Set a reasonable teaching plan**

The development of preschool education teaching plans should be based on the development of children, so as to promote the optimal growth of each individual life as the basic requirement. The preschool education teaching plan should follow the laws of children's physical and mental development, and should not be "primary schooling". The "Outline" points out that preschool education should adapt to the actual needs of young children, and is conducive to their long-term development; it is not only close to children's lives, but also helps to expand children's experience and vision. Therefore, when formulating teaching plans, teachers should appropriately enrich the teaching content based on children's learning characteristics and cognition rules, stimulate children's desire to explore and self-consciousness, and promote children's individualized development. For example, teachers can regularly carry out rich outdoor activities, leading children out of the classroom and approaching nature, allowing children to explore new knowledge in nature and gain more inspiration from personal experience and experimentation.

#### **2. Diversified teaching forms**

Preschool education not only develops children's intelligence but also shoulders the mission of cultivating children's character. Diversified teaching forms can be more targeted to improve children's comprehensive quality. Gamification teaching is an important form of preschool education. The French philosopher Rousseau believed that games have the function of returning to nature education. Gamification conforms to the physical and psychological characteristics of children who are lively, active, curious, inquisitive, and exploratory, and is conducive to the comprehensive and harmonious development of children's bodies and minds. However, teachers cannot blindly formulate games. They should focus on the four C's of "communication", "cooperation", "critical thinking" and "creativity" (Zhu Lixin, 2021). On the basis of subject teaching knowledge, game factors should be mobilized to make teaching more lively and interesting. Beyond that, children can be influenced through the teaching of stories. In the process of repeatedly listening to the story, it can strengthen children's understanding of sentences and context, improve reading ability, expand children's vocabulary, and make children's memory develop rapidly. At the same time, teachers encourage children to tell stories, which can also improve children's thinking and expression skills. The story should choose more famous novels and fables because the various beautiful thoughts and feelings of human beings in the story will also subtly shape them to form such beautiful characters as humility, courtesy, bravery, and kindness.

In short, teachers should start from the fundamentals of preschool education and provide children with a more comprehensive education. Summarize successful experiences and failure lessons in the education process, so as to improve the quality of education and enable children to obtain better-personalized development.

#### **3. Pay attention to the physical and mental health of children**

The "Outline" pointed out that preschool education should provide children with a healthy and rich living and activity environment, so that they can gain experience beneficial to physical and mental development in a happy childhood and form a sound personality. This requires teachers to always pay attention to children's physical and mental health in preschool education.

Children in the preschool stage are full of curiosity about the world but also have a certain sense of fear. They are likely to have a psychological shadow or begin to feel inferior because of the teacher's criticism. Therefore, in the preschool education stage, teachers should actively use encouraging ways, so that children are not afraid of new things, develop a sense of self-confidence, and can deal with learning calmly. In addition, teachers should also create a sense of happiness for children, so that they can feel the feeling of being cared for and paid attention to, so as to improve children's happiness index and sense of security. For example, teachers can ask classmates to celebrate a child's birthday together, so that he can feel love and blessings in the group; when some children don't wear well, teachers can ask other children to assist and guide them. To stimulate children's sense of trust and responsibility for each other. Let children grow up in an atmosphere of solidarity, mutual assistance, and positiveness, form a sound personality in love and being loved, and develop the good quality of helping each other.

### Early childhood assessments

One of the tasks is to teach children universal values of patriotism and tolerance, founded on the national idea of "Manglik El" in Kazakhstan, which is translated into English as "Eternal Country" (Collective Monograph "Mangilik El", 2022). Following modern requirements, educational work is improved in the national educational guidance based on the national compulsory standard. Nowadays, the Kazakhstani educational system uses "three-level assessment - three times during the year", pupils will receive grades only three times a year. They will certainly not require notebooks; the results are recorded in observation sheets, based on which an individual map of child development is compiled. The tests are conducted

- at the beginning (from September 1 to 10),
- in the middle (from January 10 to 20), and
- at the end (from May 20 to 30) of the academic year.

The final control should show how well the children have mastered the standard program. It is important to note that the evaluation is based on a three-tier system. The first stage indicates that the child has memorized the material. To reach the second level, understanding is also required: that is, children must not only automatically reproduce the knowledge they have acquired, but also understand its meaning. The highest, third level is assigned to students who not only know and understand the material but also apply it in practice. After all, ultimately, that is precisely the purpose of educational reform - to teach children the skills of practical use of the knowledge acquired in school.

Assessing students in the preschool preparation group helps to diagnose, stimulate, and correct student activity. The age of the child must be considered in the evaluation. During the assessment, the teacher's emotional state should be balanced with a friendly tone. The assessment should start with positive moments and then look at negative moments. One of the most efficient approaches is collective praise. When all the kids in the classroom say, "I'm smart today, I did it..." As an alternative to this type of evaluation, children like to praise other children, especially if the recognized leader of the children's team praises everyone.

### Conclusions

Overall, the integration of pre-school education into primary school should provide a developmentally appropriate educational program for children in the lower grades, laying a solid foundation for learning. In the current educational environment, preschool education has not yet achieved universalized and compulsory, which has hindered the correct development of preschool education programs. However, the authors also analyze the current preschool education in combination with certain actual situations, analyze the necessity of carrying out correct preschool education, and also put forward certain improvement suggestions.

In addition, assessment is another obligatory component of the educational process for preschoolers; it represents the teacher's opinion about the process and results of children's activities and is used as a means of stimulating, diagnosing, orienting, and educating preschoolers. The nature of the teacher's assessment is related to the child's success in the activity. Encouraging adult assessment is indeed a child's best interest in learning activities. Hopefully, this article can be helpful in further improving preschool education.

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