

Study on the Changes of China's Preschool Education System Since the Reform and Opening Up

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Abstract: Preschool education is crucial to the orderly development of national education and plays a prominent role in the social development and personality improvement of young children. With the convening of the Third Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee of the Chinese government, preschool education has gradually been emphasized. This paper takes the systems issued in different periods since the reform and opening up as the entry point for research, summarizes them into three parts: restoring the educational policy of establishing socialist nature, attaching importance to the development of young children and preschool teachers, and strengthening the standardized management of preschool education system, and proposes countermeasures for the future development of preschool education policy in China to provide action guidelines for the sustainable development of preschool education.

1. Characteristics of the Development of China's Preschool Education System Since the Reform and Opening Up

After the reform and opening up, China's preschool education has achieved unprecedented and outstanding results under the strong leadership of the government. By consulting the policy documents about preschool education since 1978, the characteristics of preschool education development can be summarized into three parts: restoring the educational policy of establishing socialist nature, attaching importance to the development of young children and preschool teachers, and strengthening the standardized management of preschool education system.

1.1 Restoring the Educational Policy of Establishing Socialist Nature

After the Third Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee of the Chinese government was held, the development direction of preschool education in China was also clarified. Combing historical documents and policies, since the reform and opening up until the mid-1980s, preschool education has always been on the development path of restoring the socialist nature, which laid the foundation for the construction of China's preschool education policy system.

Firstly, the policy of kindergarten work was established. Because the urban preschool environment suffered more serious damage during the Cultural Revolution, until the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1979, the Ministry of Education issued the *Regulations on the Work of Urban Kindergartens*, which

proposed specific corrective measures for the previous chaotic situation of kindergartens, pointing out that sound preschool education must adapt to the physical and mental development of children and promote their all-round development, while developing preschool education can also help parents reduce their burden so that they can devote themselves to work[1].

Secondly, more attention should be paid to rural preschool education. The *Opinions on the Development of Rural Preschool Education* launched by the state in the development process has a detailed plan for the orderly development of rural preschool education[2], which is crucial for the popularization and continuous improvement of the quality of preschool education, but also lays a solid foundation for the development of agriculture in China. The promulgation of this policy also requires local education administration departments to have a clearer understanding of preschool education, to have a clear plan for the fundamental role of preschool education in the construction of rural socialist modernization, and to carry out in-depth cooperation with many government departments such as the health department and the agricultural department to lay a solid foundation for the orderly development of preschool education. The State Council also promulgated the *Opinions on the Current Development of Preschool Education* in 2010, and through the study of this policy, it is also found that the state attaches great importance to the further expansion of preschool resources in rural areas, and the importance of preschool education cannot be ignored when carrying out the construction work of the new socialist countryside, in which the development of kindergartens is also planned in a unified manner to narrow the gap between urban and rural areas and to ensure the legal rights of young children in rural areas[3].

Thirdly, the reform of preschool education system should be accelerated. The *Decision of the Central Committee of Chinese government on the Reform of the Education System* clearly states that the main purpose of preschool education is to serve the construction work of socialism. The launch of the *Opinions on the Current Development of Preschool Education* requires local governments to pay more attention to preschool education and invest more quality resources in preschool education to ensure further improvement of preschool education investment, which is conducive to the sustainable development of kindergartens.

1.2 Attaching Importance to the Development of Young Children and Preschool Teachers

Firstly, the health care system for young children and the educational program should be improved. The *Health Care System for Nursery Schools and Kindergartens* contains specific regulations on diet and disease prevention for young children. Since its introduction in the 1980s, the *Kindergarten Education Program* has focused on the pedagogical value of play, emphasizing the all-round development of preschool children and providing detailed descriptions of the physical and psychological developmental characteristics of children at different ages; in 1989, the *Kindergarten Work Regulations (for Trial Implementation)* were formally introduced, establishing the status of play as an important educational tool and requiring that teaching and learning be fun and that students learn more while gaining physical and mental development. At the beginning of this century, the *Kindergarten Education Guidelines (for Trial Implementation)* was issued to clarify the beginning of preschool education, and kindergartens should carry out quality education in depth.

Secondly, more attention was paid to the development of preschool teacher education. The *Opinions on Strengthening and Developing Teacher Education* clearly pointed out that preschool teacher training schools are an important prerequisite for preschool education. After the reform and opening up, the nation's preschool teacher training schools also gained greater development, and by the early 1980s, there were 22 such schools nationwide, with more than 9,000 students. The *Teaching Plan for Preschool Teacher Training Schools* reformed the curriculum for preschool education, introducing hours for arts and physical education classes, and in the process further increasing the

number of hours for specialized classes in education, allowing students to have longer internships in the learning process[4]. The *Teachers Law of the People's Republic of China*, enacted in the 1990s, also regulates the obligations and rights of teachers, who should have the ability to learn throughout their lives and pay more attention to their ideological and political as well as operational abilities, and through a series of training programs, teachers are always able to keep up with the direction of the times. It also attaches great importance to ethnic minorities and remote and poor areas, and has launched a series of preferential policies to train more teachers for these areas. It is necessary to improve the treatment of teachers and protect their legitimate rights and interests, so that the teaching profession can become a profession admired by society and the people; in addition, the responsibilities and obligations of teachers are also clearly defined, requiring teachers to care for and love students, to ensure the sustainable development of students, and to cultivate more and better talents for the development of the country and society. Only when teachers truly fulfill their obligations can they ensure the smooth realization of their authority, and teachers law is conducive to the development of preschool education. The state also launched *Opinions on the Current Development of Preschool Education* in 2010, a document that attaches great importance to preschool teacher training and provides guidelines for the construction of a scientific system.

1.3 Strengthening the Standardized Management of Preschool Education System

The restoration of the preschool education division in 1978 marked the end of a chaotic preschool leadership system that had been in place for more than a decade and ushered in a new beginning for the preschool education business. In the late 1970s, with the formulation and promotion of many documents such as the *Regulations on the Work of Urban Kindergartens (Trial Draft)*, the scientific leadership and management of kindergartens were strengthened, and comprehensive regulations were made for the management of kindergartens, which became the basis for running kindergartens in both urban and rural areas. In the early 1990s, our government also deepened cooperation with the United Nations and signed the *World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children*, a document that has enabled preschool education in China to keep up with the development trend and catch up with the gap between developed countries to give every child a better future. In order to promote the legitimate rights and interests of minors and ensure their healthy development, China also enacted the *Law on the Protection of Minors* (1991) to strengthen the awareness of guardians as the first responsible person, as well as to clarify the reporting system of school kindergartens, and in the process, the *Outline of China's Child Development Plan for the 1990s* (1992) was also promulgated. Several educational policies reflect the people-oriented approach, which can make the legitimate rights and interests of children truly protected. The *Kindergarten Work Regulations* were fully improved after sufficient practice, taking into account the actual development of China, and came into force after a brief revision. In the 21st century, the study of preschool children has become more in-depth, and in the process of development, the *Guidelines for the Learning and Development of Children Aged 3-6* (hereinafter referred to as the *Guidelines*) have been formulated to ensure that teachers and parents have a clearer understanding of the growth patterns of children. The *Guidelines* clearly state what children aged 3-6 can do at each age and whether they have reached the appropriate level of development, which gives parents and teachers a model to work from when doing specific tasks. At this stage of development, in order to promote the high quality development of preschool education, the state has also launched the *14th Five-Year Plan of Action for the Development of Preschool Education*, which reinforces the specific responsibilities that the government needs to undertake, so that the government can really fulfill its own responsibilities in the specific work to escort the development of preschool education. This is mainly reflected in the increase in the number of public kindergartens, increased financial support, and the provision of relief policies for

disadvantaged groups such as poor areas and low-income families, guidance on the development of local special teaching materials, scientific guidance on the interface between kindergarten and primary school, and the strengthening of teacher training to improve the professionalism of preschool teachers.

2. Problems of China's Preschool Education Policy Since the Reform and Opening Up

2.1 Lack of National Special Laws for Preschool Education

After decades of practice and exploration, China has formulated a series of policies for preschool education, but no special laws have been formulated for it, unlike the special laws for compulsory education and higher education[5].

2.2 Blindness and Lag of China's Existing Preschool Education Policy

With the high development of society and the strengthening of international exchange and cooperation, China's preschool education has undergone radical changes, but the existing policies were basically formulated during the reform and opening-up period, and it has been modified mainly on the basis of the original ones the subsequent decades, which have not been well adapted to the changes of the current new situation. In particular, the number of private kindergartens has increased dramatically in recent years, breaking the long-standing pattern of public kindergartens as the dominant school, but the government has not planned ahead to formulate relevant policies to guide or avoid the problems that may arise in private kindergartens, and often the government only starts to formulate policies after the problems of private kindergartens have emerged. Therefore, there is still a certain lag in China's preschool education policy.

2.3 There is Inequality in Preschool Education in Terms of Policy

The government has devoted more attention to urban and public kindergartens, but not to the development of rural preschools and private kindergartens. In the development of preschool education, local governments are primarily responsible. If the local revenue is substantial, public kindergartens are well developed, especially in the eastern coastal areas where kindergartens are advantageous. On the contrary, in the backward areas, especially in the western rural kindergartens, the lack of stable funding sources has made the development of kindergartens difficult, and many rural kindergartens are unable to find students and have to stop operating.

3. Reform Trend of China's Preschool Education Policy

China's education has been fully developed since the reform and opening up, but with the development of society, the growth of economic capacity and the improvement of cultural quality, the public's demand for preschool education has changed qualitatively from being able to go to school to going to famous school, which has also ushered in new challenges for the development of preschool education in China. In the course of this paper, through in-depth analysis of the opportunities for the development of preschool education in China, the following suggestions are made:

3.1 Accelerate the Legislation of Preschool Education and Provide Fundamental Legal Protection

The country cannot be ruled without law, and the people cannot be established without law. The *Preschool Education Law* is the only way to create a good environment and promote the orderly

development of preschool education. Only with the enactment of relevant laws can the rights of children and teachers be truly guaranteed. In addition, the law can also clarify the responsibilities of the government and provide a clear direction for the development of preschool education at the legal level. Furthermore, strengthening the legislation of preschool education is conducive to the convergence with international children's education. Education is the booster of national soft power, and the developed countries in Europe and America attach great importance to preschool education, and have already formulated special preschool education laws to regulate the preschool education business. In order to better exchange and cooperate with international children's business, learn from other countries' advanced education concepts and education models, and better protect children's rights and interests, China should speed up its legislative steps.

3.2 Accelerate Education Reform and Promote the Internal Development of Preschool Education

In the process of development in the new period, it should attach great importance to the construction of provincial and municipal high-quality kindergartens. Pay high attention to education modernization and other development opportunities to develop a special investment policy of funds to stimulate the power of society as well as the government as a whole. Also, pay attention to the creation of preschool education characteristics brand, take children's prints and other existing local resources as a starting point, attach great importance to the development of folk free-hand games and other local courses, and also publish the accompanying specific teaching materials, develop class-based curriculum, develop the intelligence of young children, and promote the overall development of preschool education; and then make every effort to strengthen the construction of provincial and municipal curriculum base. Take "1+1" and other related support measures to create a better environment for the development of preschool education.

3.3 Rational Allocation of Preschool Education Resources to Ensure Educational Equity

Reasonable allocation of preschool education resources ensures that preschool education policies can truly make all parties fair. After achieving financial investment, it is necessary to guarantee the high-quality operation of preschool education, and it is also necessary to optimize the various public services related to it and promote the improvement of preschool education operation conditions. Improve the system and strengthen supervision. Specify kindergarten operation and preschool education management system. Pay more attention to vulnerable groups of children and related subjects such as rural kindergartens; give priority policy support to backward and rural areas, clarify government's responsibilities to ensure the orderly development of private kindergartens and the full protection of children's right to education. Government departments should form a joint posture, and actively implement the relevant functions and regulatory responsibilities. Combine your own requirements, according to local conditions, develop kindergarten charging standards, and firmly curb the kindergarten into a quick profit "profit garden" behavior.

Since the reform and opening up, China's preschool education, although there are some problems in the process of development, always shows a good trend. With the development of China's economy and the improvement of civilization, further attention will be paid to preschool education, and the 14th Five-Year Plan formulated by the state attaches great importance to the principle of public welfare in education and points out that it will also be steadfastly pursued in the future development process. In addition, it is also necessary to take effective means to promote educational equity and to provide nationwide coverage of inclusive preschool education so that young children can have a better environment for their growth.

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