

# A Research of the Development of Private Kindergartens and the Role of the Government

Zouyu Ping<sup>\*</sup>, and Ding Yu

School of Grammar and Economics, Wuhan University of Science and Technology, Hong Shan District, Wuhan, China

**Keywords:** private kindergartens, development, government role.

**Abstract:** Encouraged and permitted by national policies, the development of private kindergartens in China has been rapid. From the beginning of the reform and opening up to now, private kindergartens have accounted for half of the number of kindergartens in China and have become an important part of our education system. It is undeniable that private kindergartens have made outstanding contributions to the development of education in China in terms of improving education supply and service capabilities, but we should also pay attention to various problems in the development of private kindergartens. These problems are hindering the overall progress of China's preschool education, and the public is eager to be properly resolved. However, in order to cope with these problems, we cannot rely on market means. Instead, we must use the "hand of the government" to actively play the relevant role of the government and assume the government's proper functions in order to promote the healthy and sustainable development of private kindergartens.

## 1. Introduction

After years of development, private kindergartens have been fully developed. Both the number of kindergartens and the quality of running schools have been greatly improved, making remarkable contributions to the progress of China's education. In this process, the role played by the government is also constantly adjusted according to the actual needs, and has been improved in standardization, schematization and institutionalization.

## 2. Development Status of Private Kindergartens

The tradition of private learning has existed in China since ancient times. From the spring and autumn period and the warring states period to modern times, the tradition of private learning has been maintained for nearly 2,000 years. The existence of private schools breaks the situation of government monopoly on education, opens up educational channels, and enables more children of common people to receive education, which has positive significance. Although there are essential differences between private preschool education and ancient private education, it is very necessary for folk forces to participate in the cause of early childhood education considering China's national conditions and the general law of education development.

### 2.1 The Development of Private Kindergartens Is Generally Good

In developing the private education mainly in after the reform and opening-up policy, the new 1982 through the "constitution of the People's Republic of China" to encourage various forms of social forces in accordance with the national law education undertakings of various kinds, which are held for the rise of private education in China, provides the system guarantee of the fundamental, fully arouse the enthusiasm of the social forces involved in the education, developed from the private kindergarten. According to a survey by the ministry of education, in 2000, the number of private kindergartens in China reached 44,317, with 2.842 million students, accounting for 25.2 percent of the total number of kindergartens in China and 12.7 percent of the total number of students in kindergartens.<sup>[1]</sup> In this period, private preschool education developed rapidly, but its

overall level was not high due to its low starting point. However, with continuous progress and accumulation, this situation was fully changed after 2010. By 2014, the number of private kindergartens had reached 139,282, with 21,254,000 students, according to the official website of the ministry of education. In 2018, the number of private kindergartens in China reached 165,779 with 26.398 million students, up 19 percent and 24 percent respectively on the basis of 2014 (see table1).<sup>[2]</sup>

Table 1 Basic situation of private kindergartens in China from 2014 to 2018

years	kindergartens	students	teachers	students
2018	165779	26397847	1608936	26397847
2017	160372	25723434	1510277	25723434
2016	154203	24376589	1393454	24376589
2015	146376	23024429	1271211	23024429
2014	139282	21253781	1131802	21253781

It is not difficult to find from the data that after 2000, the development speed of private kindergartens has been very fast. The importance of private kindergartens in the overall early childhood education is equal to that of public kindergartens, and even exceeds that of public kindergartens in some specific indicators. In 2014, the total number of private kindergartens and students in kindergartens only reached 25.2 percent and 12.7 percent of the total number of national kindergartens and students in kindergartens respectively. By 2014, the ratio between the number of private kindergartens and the total number of national kindergartens was 66.36 percent, and the ratio between the number of kindergarten students and the total number of national kindergartens was 52.5 percent. Since 2014, the proportion of private kindergartens in the total has remained above 60 percent, and the proportion of kindergarten students in the total has remained above 50 percent. Based on the above data, it can be said that private kindergartens occupy almost half of China's early childhood education.

## 2.2 Uneven Development of Private Kindergartens

On the whole, the development of private kindergartens in China is good. However, when the overall good condition is differentiated into the urban-rural dual structure, it can be found that the performance gap between the urban and rural geographic space of private kindergartens is very wide. Consistent with the long-term imbalanced development of urban and rural areas in China, the development of private kindergartens in urban areas also presents the characteristics of imbalanced development. The development level of private kindergartens in urban areas is significantly higher than that in rural areas. What is more worrying is that this polarization has not been effectively alleviated, but has the tendency to widen. Under the market competition and incentive, in order to meet parents' high expectations for early childhood education, private kindergartens in the city continuously improve the teaching conditions, improve the teaching theory, and introduce high-quality teachers, objectively promoting the overall progress of private kindergartens in the city. Rural faces the opposite, some private kindergarten is unwilling also unable to provide high quality early childhood education, they seized the chance of a large number of left-behind children in rural areas, largely in order to meet the needs of parents to look after their children, for the left-behind children provides a place for stranded, kindergarten education function has not been fully released. Although there are also public kindergartens in rural areas, the number of public kindergartens is very small, often only one public kindergarten in a township, there is no ability to absorb all the school-age children, in addition to private kindergartens in order to compete, reduce the price of kindergarten admission, private kindergartens are lower than public kindergartens. Although the low price caters to the rural parents' psychology of low investment in preschool education, the low price will inevitably reduce the quality of private kindergartens. According to the Chinese academy of sciences agricultural policy research center on the three provinces and six state-level poor counties of rural school-age children ability development and preschool education basic situation of a comprehensive survey, rural children, especially in the backward areas of rural children,

compared with urban children, is indeed far behind the starting line.<sup>[3]</sup>

Additional attention should be paid to the fact that the urban-rural gap between private kindergartens is not only reflected in the same region, but also between different regions. According to the classification standard of typical east and central China, private kindergartens are also used in the eastern region, and the kindergarten management level in the eastern region is significantly higher than that in the central and western regions. However, in the backward western regions, both urban and rural private preschool education are far from being comparable with that in the eastern and central regions. Lack of economic and educational resources has led to school-age children in some poor areas not only receiving high-quality preschool education, but also not even having the opportunity and conditions to receive preschool education. Given China's vast rural areas and the current problems of agriculture, rural areas and farmers, the problem of preschool education in rural areas is worrying.

### 2.3 The Development of Private Kindergartens Has Entered the Stage of Improving Quality

The time of educational reform and development in China is basically consistent with the time of reform and opening up. The limited time of opening private kindergartens is about 1979. In the more than 30 years from this year to 2010, the main contradiction of preschool education in China is that the number of kindergartens (including public and private) is insufficient to meet the educational needs of school-age children. In 2010, the number of kindergartens in China accounted for only 62 percent of all school-age children, with a gap of more than 30 percent. Therefore, the supply of preschool education industry is significantly less than the demand.<sup>[4]</sup> But the situation soon eased after 2010. With the state's strong investment in public preschool education and the society's enthusiastic investment in private preschool education, the total number of kindergartens has increased rapidly. From 2014 to 2018, the number of private kindergartens increased from 139,282 to 165,779, while the total number of kindergartens in China increased from 209,881 to 266,677. The proportion of private kindergartens in the total number of kindergartens in China decreased from 66.36 percent to 62.16 percent. This at least shows that the number of public kindergartens is increasing faster than that of private kindergartens, or that the number of private kindergartens is beginning to slow down. In fact, it can also be found in the average number of kindergarten children. From 2014 to 2017, the average number of students in private kindergartens increased from 152 to 160. In 2018, the average number of students in private kindergartens dropped to 159. As shown in figure 1, in the past five years, the curve of change of the average students in private kindergartens is relatively flat, and there is even a small drop in 2018, which is generally in a stable state.<sup>[5]</sup> From this, it can be seen that the number of private kindergartens has basically reached the saturation state, and any increase in the number may further reduce the average number of students in kindergartens. In other words, the extensive development stage characterized by quantity expansion and scale expansion of private kindergartens has passed and entered the connotative development stage aiming at improving quality.

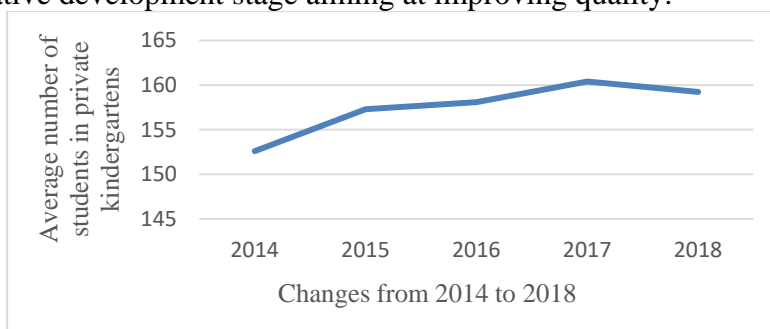


Figure 1 Changes in the average number of students in private kindergartens from 2014 to 2018

In July 2010, the ministry of education issued the outline of the national program for medium - and long-term education reform and development (2010-2020) (hereinafter referred to as the outline), emphasizing the comprehensive improvement of the quality of education. In fact, it marked that China's education development has entered a stage of quality improvement. The outline

clearly states that "the development of preschool education should be included in the plan for the construction of new urban and socialist countryside, and a government-led, community-involved and public-run kindergarten system should be established. Public kindergartens should be vigorously developed and private kindergartens should be actively supported." In this context, preschool education, like other stages of education, has entered a new stage of high-quality development. In the future work, private kindergartens should aim at improving the quality of running kindergartens, aim at providing education that the government can rest assured of and the market can satisfy, and focus on promoting the quality and level of private preschool education.

### **3. Status Quo Of Government's Role in the Development of Private Kindergartens**

China's private infant business from scratch, from the beginning to now, has been closely linked with the role of the government. From the current situation, in the development of private kindergartens, the government's role is mainly reflected in three aspects: policy support, government regulation and service provision.

#### **3.1 Improve Policy Support**

Relevant policy support has always been accompanied by the development of China's private infant business. In 1954, after three socialist reforms, China took over the preschool education institutions established in China by other countries, and also took over the former private kindergartens and made them all public. In other words, after the three reforms and before the reform and opening up, China's private education system is in a restricted state.

At the beginning of the reform and opening up in 1978, the institutional environment of private kindergartens was also loosened and they were given a chance to develop again. In 1977, Deng Xiaoping put forward the policy of "education still needs to walk on two legs",<sup>[6]</sup> releasing the signal that education should adhere to the "public and private" mode. In 1978, he pointed out in the national science congress: "education is not just the business of the education sector, all walks of life should support education, vigorously run education."<sup>[7]</sup> The directive further opened the door to private education and provided important impetus for the goal of "walking on two legs". In this atmosphere, the ministry of education then promulgated the regulations on the work of urban kindergartens (draft for trial implementation) (1979) and the program for kindergarten education (draft for trial implementation) (1981), providing normative guidance for the specific work process of public and private kindergartens. In 1982, article 19 of the newly adopted constitution stipulates: "the state encourages collectives, economic organizations, state enterprises, institutions and other social forces to set up educational undertakings of all kinds in accordance with the law." For the first time, encouraging private education was written into the constitution, which fundamentally dispelled the society's doubts and confusion about private preschool education. The decision of the central committee of the communist party of China on the reform of the education system in 1985 and the outline for the reform and development of education in China in 1992 both pointed out that we should encourage and guide state-owned enterprises, social organizations and individuals to run schools and donate funds to help students. In 1997, the state council issued the regulations on running schools by social forces, stipulating that "the running of schools by social forces is an integral part of socialist education" and making preschool education the focus of social forces. The social forces to school regulations promulgated, marked the our country run by the local education mechanism of mature, also marks for private education in China (including private pre-school education) policy support end groping stage, entered the mature stage of policy implementation, while there might be some adjustment in policy, but has been basically no big change in the strategic pattern.

#### **3.2 Implementation of Macro Management and Supervision**

In addition to providing policy support, the government's role in the development of private kindergartens is also reflected in macro management and supervision. After the reform and opening up, our country liberalizes the restriction of private education, private kindergartens get rapid

development. But at the same time, due to the relative legal system construction and management lag behind, did not keep up with the pace of the development of private kindergartens, resulting in some school-related problems, causing concern of the society and the government. Based on this situation, in 1987, the then ministry of education issued a number of interim provisions on the running of schools by social forces, emphasizing the need to "strengthen macro-management" while encouraging and supporting the running of schools by social forces. Then, in view of the specific problems in the process of private education, a series of related regulations were issued, and on the basis of these regulations, a management system for private education was established, which was led by the ministry of education and coordinated and supported by several ministries such as labor, personnel, health and finance.<sup>[8]</sup> In addition to the programmatic document, in order to strengthen the management of early childhood education and guidance, in 1989, the ministry of education also enacted specifically the kindergarten management regulations, the regulation of kindergarten at the threshold set in detail, and strict approval procedures, made clear that "without registration, no unit or individual shall not be held kindergarten, also stipulates that" the local people's governments at various levels of education administrative department in charge of the kindergarten management work within their respective administrative jurisdictions ". This can be explained at least two points. First, under the conditions at that time, the admission threshold of kindergartens was raised, and the government strengthened the examination and approval of private kindergartens. The second is to clarify the main body of responsibility. The education administrative departments of local people's governments at all levels shall conduct daily supervision over the operation of kindergartens within their jurisdiction. In case of any problem, the local education administrative departments shall be held accountable and held accountable. This regulation, no doubt increased the supervision pressure of the local education administration departments, also objectively led to the government to increase the supervision of the work of private kindergartens. Under the influence of these systems, around 1990, the growth rate of private kindergartens in China slowed down, but the standardization improved more than before. More importantly, the supervision responsibility of local education administrative departments has been clarified, and the supervision work of private kindergartens has been normalized and prolonged.

### **3.3 Provide Relevant Services**

Providing relevant services to promote and accelerate the development of private kindergartens is also the role of the government in the development of private kindergartens. Private kindergartens are an important supplement to preschool education. Private kindergartens account for almost half of the whole preschool education in China, and their importance cannot be ignored. Therefore, in addition to supervision, the government also needs to provide tangible services. At present, the service provided by the government to private kindergartens mainly includes two aspects: on the one hand, the service to universal private kindergartens; on the other hand, the service to for-profit kindergartens. Private kindergartens can be broadly divided into two categories, inclusive kindergartens and for-profit kindergartens. Universal kindergarten refers to the non-profit kindergarten with low fees, which has been the focus of the national development and support. In 2017, the number of private kindergartens exceeded 160,000, accounting for more than 60 percent of China's total, but only about 43 percent of the 160,000 private kindergartens were universal kindergartens. In January 2019, the central office promulgated the implementation of urban community supporting kindergarten administrative work notice, referring to "community supporting kindergarten should be the local administrative department of education public park or entrust succeeds universality private garden", emphasis on developing public park at the same time, actively support and guide more private kindergartens provide general services, in order to realize the universality of the CPC central committee and the state council determined to 2020 kindergarten coverage reached 80 percent target.<sup>[9]</sup> The government will subsidize universal kindergartens by purchasing public services or directly. Of course, the government does not force all private kindergartens to become universal kindergartens, and the organizers can choose and position them as profit-making kindergartens according to market needs. In 2017, the Chinese government

officially recognized the rationality of the existence of for-profit kindergartens for the first time. For for-profit kindergartens, IPO and listing are not only allowed, but also the competent authorities have been changed from local education administrative departments to local industry and commerce administrative departments,<sup>[10]</sup> to meet the demands of for-profit kindergartens for improving quality and business performance.

#### 4. Conclusion

The importance of preschool education is self-evident, because the object of preschool education is still growing children, so the community has high expectations for preschool education. In China's preschool education system, private kindergartens currently undertake most of the educational responsibilities, with more than half of school-age children receiving education in private kindergartens. Restricted by various reasons, there are still many problems in private kindergartens, and the solution of these problems to a large extent requires the government to play a correct role.

#### References

- [1] Zhang Aiqin. Research on the relationship between private kindergartens and local education administrative agencies. East China Normal University, 2003.
- [2] Statistics of education. (2019-10-01). Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, [http://www.moe.gov.cn/s78/A03/moe\\_560/jytjsj\\_2018/](http://www.moe.gov.cn/s78/A03/moe_560/jytjsj_2018/).
- [3] Cui Qinghua, Kong Zhong. Causes and Countermeasures of Unfairness in Preschool Education in Rural Areas. Journal of Hebei Normal University: Educational Science Edition, 2011 (9): 75-78.
- [4] Analysis of the development status and development trend of China's private kindergarten industry in 2018. (2018-08-11). China Industry Information Network, <http://www.chyxx.com/industry/201808/666215.html>.
- [5] Statistics of education. (2019-10-01). Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, [http://www.moe.gov.cn/s78/A03/moe\\_560/jytjsj\\_2018/](http://www.moe.gov.cn/s78/A03/moe_560/jytjsj_2018/).
- [6] Zhong Hui. Education still needs to walk on two legs: learning "Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping". Journal of East China Normal University (Education Science Edition), 1983 (2): 1-2.
- [7] Hu Wei: Burning a glow for education. (2019-06-03). China Democracy Promotion Association, [http://www.mj.org.cn/news/content/2019-06/03/content\\_326196\\_2.htm](http://www.mj.org.cn/news/content/2019-06/03/content_326196_2.htm).
- [8] Zhang Aiqin. Research on the relationship between private kindergartens and local education administrative agencies. East China Normal University, 2003.
- [9] Ministry of Education: Not only will private kindergartens not withdraw from the historical stage; the government will also increase support. (2019-02-02). Tencent, <https://new.qq.com/omn/20190202/20190202A10NJF.html>.
- [10] Interpretation of the latest development rules of private kindergartens in 2017 by the Ministry of Education. (2017-07-25). Sohu. [http://m.sohu.com/a/159951642\\_673419](http://m.sohu.com/a/159951642_673419).