

China's Preschool Education Toward 2035: Views of Key Policy Experts

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Abstract

Purpose: 2020 is the concluding year of the basic preschool education popularization policy in China and marks the beginning of *China's Education Modernization 2035*. This study focuses on the top-level design and the prospect of the development plan of China's preschool education toward 2035.

Design/Approach/Methods: The research method adopted is expert interview. We interviewed 11 experts, including policymakers, educational administrators, scholars, and practitioners in the education.

Findings: To develop China's preschool education, we need to integrate macro-level, meso-level, and micro-level contents: focusing on public welfare as the development concept, furthering the reform of the educational system and mechanism, making quality improvement the plan's key goal, and forming a new preschool education development mode with Chinese characteristics.

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Originality/Value: This study hopes to clarify the focus to have an impact on China's preschool education toward 2035. It also aims to provide suggestions about preschool education development for other countries.

Keywords

China's education modernization 2035, developmental plans, expert interview, preschool education

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Context

Since preschool education has a great impact on the development of individuals, families, and countries (Edwards, 2001; Yu & Miao, 2015), the quality improvement of preschool education has become a global trend. Countries and relevant organizations worldwide have designed plans for the development of preschool education. Through the integrated analysis of the *Incheon Declaration for Education 2030* (UNESCO, 2015), *Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage* (U.K., 2017), *Every Student Succeeds Act* (U.S., 2015), *Investing in the Early Years—A National Early Childhood Development Strategy* (Australia, 2009), *Pathways to the Future: Nga Huarahi Arataki* (New Zealand, 2002), *Hakutulokset hakusanalla: Education and research development plan 2011–2016* (Finland, 2011), and *Major Policies and Plans for 2016* (Korea, 2016), it is found that they all emphasize high-quality preschool education, paying attention to preschool education equity and disadvantaged children, improving the quality of teachers, and so on. In addition, the application and gradual popularization of the Internet, Internet of Things, Big Data, cloud computing, artificial intelligence, sensor technology, robotics, virtual reality, and other new technologies in the field of education (Yang, 2019) has also injected fresh vitality into the development of preschool education, leading it toward the intelligent age.

Achievements of preschool education in China since 2010

In China, the development of preschool education is being led by the government (Hou, 2016), which mainly relies on policies to promote it. In 2010, *the National Outline for Medium and Long Term Education Reform and Development (2010–2020)* and several statements made the State Council on the current development of preschool education were issued. Starting in 2011, all regions in China have formulated and implemented *Three-year Action Plans for Preschool Education* to promote the standardization and quality development of preschool education.

With the development of society and promotion of policies, preschool education, as the foundation of basic education in China, has undergone tremendous changes. Various indicators show a rapid growth trend and remarkable achievements of the preschool education in China (see Table 1).

Table 1. Some indicators of China's preschool education development in 2010 and 2018.

Indicators	2010	2018	Growth rate (%)
The gross enrollment rate of preschool education (%)	56.6	81.7	25.1
Number of preschools (N)	150,420	266,677	77.29
Number of classes (N)	971,525	1,678,924	72.81
Number of full-time preschool teachers (N)	1,144,225	2,581,363	125.60
Number of childcare workers (N)	160,330	910,332	467.79
Financial investment in preschool education in China's public budget (RMB)	21.874 billion	154.607 billion	606.81
Number of preschool teachers with a junior college degree or a higher education background (N)	689,952	2,090,076	202.93

Note. The data involved in this table and "Short Board in the Development of Preschool Education in China" part are from the education statistics and the financial investment bulletin of the Ministry of Education of China in relevant years.

For example, the popularization rate of preschool education has increased significantly. In 2018, the gross enrollment rate of preschool education was 81.7%, which was 25.1% higher than that of the gross enrollment rate in 2010. The growth rate of the number of school-age children attending preschool and the gross enrollment rate of disadvantaged children attending preschool education (especially in the central and western outlying areas, along with the poverty-stricken areas) is also relatively high (He et al., 2018). Preschool education resources have expanded geometrically. After the preschool education data of 2018 and 2010 are compared, it is observed that the total number of preschools in China increased by 77.29% in 2018, number of classes increased by 72.81%, number of full-time preschool teachers increased by 125.60%, and number of childcare workers increased by 467.79%. Financial investment in preschool education has increased significantly. By 2017, financial investment in preschool education in China's public budget increased from 21.874 billion RMB to 154.607 billion RMB, more than 6 times as compared to 2010. The education level of preschool teachers has also developed steadily. Since 2010, the Ministry of Education has successively issued *Kindergarten teacher professional standards (2012)*, *Kindergarten staff allocation standards (Provisional) (2013)*, *Kindergarten director professional standards (2015)*, and other documents, which specify conditions of eligibility for preschool teachers and directors, and give clear directives with respect to staffing and other aspects. As of 2018, out of the total number of teachers, the percentage of preschool teachers with a junior college degree or a higher education background reached 80.98%. This figure shows that the number of teachers having a higher educational background have tripled since 2010. At the same time, the number of teachers participating in various types of training programs at all levels has continued to increase. Owing to the

current implementation of the National Training and Provincial Training of Basic Education Teachers, the level of training of preschool teachers is relatively high (Hui & Chu, 2015). Thus, China's preschool education has entered a period of rapid development.

Weak points in the development of preschool education in China

However, there are some problems that hamper the development of preschool education in China, such as regional and urban-rural differences in the quality of education (Luo & Li, 2017; Ye & Zhang, 2015). Some of these differences concern the curriculum and reflect the different stages of education development in different regions. Furthermore, a long-term funding guarantee mechanism for preschool education has not yet been established. As China's preschool education funds implement the "county-based" investment system, large-scale differences exist in areas due to insufficient county-level financial investment (Bu et al., 2011). Moreover, the amount of investment is too low, and the local government's financial investment in different types of preschools is significantly different in different areas (Hong & Jiang, 2018). In addition, the number of preschool education teachers still needs to be increased, as there is a high children-teacher ratio. In 2018, the children-teacher ratio was 18:1 in preschools and the proportion of teachers with professional titles and ranks was 75.67%, far higher than that of primary and secondary school teachers. Moreover, the overall treatment of preschool teachers is poor, and the serious shortage of staff in public preschools (Wu et al., 2018), such as part of the preschool teachers' salaries, can only meet the basic needs of life, and their work is massive and complicated. These problems adversely affect the stable development of preschool teachers.

The year 2020 is of great significance as it is the concluding year of the National Outline for Medium and Long-term Education Reform and Development (2010-2020) and the 13th Five-Year Plan. It is also the opening year of China's Education Modernization 2035 (proposed in 2019) and the preschool education legislation.

In the report of the *19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China*, it was proposed that steady progress should be made to ensure people's access to childcare and education. To accomplish the basic tasks of education development, modern educational governance thought has focused on reforms in preschool education, emphasizing children's sustainable development, valuing every child's interest and hobbies, and placing importance on the growth in the happiness of children. We should adhere to the fundamental task of assisting the people to cultivate virtue, and this task is also a new requirement of the times for the development of preschool education. The problem of "difficulty to access the preschool" has become the "difficulty to access the public preschool" in some areas (Du, 2016; Liu, 2018). The needs of parents have changed from "preschool for all children" to "good preschool for all children," reflecting new needs and aspirations. These needs are closely related to the explicit and realistic interests of the masses.

Based on the abovementioned background and expectations, this study aims to carry out top-level design and the prospect of the development plan of preschool education and uses expert interview method to integrate the suggestions and ideas of 11 experts (including policymakers, educational administrators, scholars, and practitioners) and puts forward the development plan of China's preschool education toward 2035. And the analysis of the interviews is carried out to have an impact on the practice and theoretical research of preschool education in the policy field, the practice field, and the research field and to provide suggestions for the strategic planning of preschool education development in other countries.

Method

Expert interview is a widely used qualitative interview method often aiming at gaining information about or exploring a specific field of action (Döringer, 2021), which is in line with the research needs of this study, so this study used the method of expert interview. Through the analysis of existing studies, we found that researchers focus more on the strategic planning of preschool education development using the research method of policy text analysis. We found that researchers pay more attention to meso-level contents, such as financial investment in preschool education and construction of teaching staff, or the microlevel contents, such as the gross enrollment rate of preschool education, the number of public preschools, and the number of accessible preschools with low prices (Bao, 2018; Huang, 2011). They seldom put forward relevant suggestions from the perspective of the macro system (Cao, 2017). This study interviewed experts from different professional backgrounds, scholars from different units, administrative personnel, and practitioners in order to interpret the practical views of different stakeholders on the development of preschool education from multiple perspectives to accomplish the set goals of development of preschool education by 2035. This study aimed to suggest changes to make the preschool education system more reasonable and reliable and to have a certain impact on the sustainable development of preschool education in the policy domain.

As a part of the expert interview approach, researchers visit or organize interviews with highly qualified and representative experts for specific topics, record the interview contents, and then conduct comprehensive content analysis to draw conclusions (Zhang et al., 2016). This approach is widely used in the fields of education, medicine, and so on. This approach is also used in the process of government policy planning, decision-making, and implementation (Broda et al., 2017; Vidal-Hall et al., 2019).

Selecting interviewees

This study selected 11 experts. We looked for potential interviewees from different research institutes, universities, and government institutions in the fields of education theory research,

education policy research, and preschool education by taking into account policymakers, educational administrators, scholars, and preschool directors. Timeliness and foresight are needed to understand the current situation and needs of preschool education development in China from the perspectives of policymaking, formulation and implementation of policy, theoretical research, and practical exploration. These two qualities are needed to think deeply about the accomplishment of the development plan of preschool education in China by 2035. To this end, we selected 11 experts (see Table 2) including policymakers and educational administrators who can effectively influence the formulation and implementation of preschool education policies. We also included university scholars and preschool directors who have rich theoretical research and practical research experience. Because of the differences in the interviewees' locations and times, we adopted different interview forms. After communicating and coordinating with the interviewees, the interviewees located in the same city participated in a group interview. We conducted a telephonic interview or a face-to-face interview with the interviewees who were located in the same city but could not participate in the group interview. The interviewees who were not in the same area participated in a telephonic interview.

Structure of the interview

The basic framework of the interview included the opinions of experts on the current situation, policies, and existing problems of preschool education and the main challenges and future planning in the face of the development of preschool education toward 2035 (see Table 3).

Analysis

Data analysis consisted of two stages. In the first stage, thematic analysis was conducted. The advantage of this method lies in its flexibility and compatibility. In the second stage, Bacchi's "What's the problem represented to be?" (WPR) policy analysis method was used, which takes policy as the premise of discourse and uses models to perform a critical analysis of the preschool education decision-making process (Bacchi, 2009). This method enables analysts to question how to express specific meaning through discourse in policy design. Similar to the statement that "policy is both text and action, words and deeds, it is what is enacted as well as what is intended" put forward by Stephen Ball (1995), the intention of policy recommendations can be understood through the review of the experts' interviews by analyzing their key considerations in the process of policy formulation.

Findings

Through the integration analysis of the key points of preschool education in 2035 mentioned by policymakers, education managers, scholars, and kindergarten directors, we found that (see

Table 2. Basic information of the experts.

Name	Unit	Title/position	Identity	Research field
Lijuan Pang	BNU	Vice Chairman of Minjin Central Committee; Member of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress; Vice Chairman of the Standing Committee of Beijing Municipal People's Congress; Professor	Researcher: committed to the promotion of preschool education legislation	Preschool education; educational theory and management; psychology
Jinlong Sang	Beijing Academy of Educational Sciences	Vice President; Researcher	Researcher: participating in the formulation of education policy in Beijing	Education theory and management; higher education; secondary education;
Jianhui Xiong	National Center for Education Development Research	Researcher	Researcher: staff member of the Ministry of Education; participating in domestic and international education research; participating in formulating the 14th 5-year plan for education	Education theory and management
Rong He	Shanghai Municipal Education Commission	Instructional Coach	Researcher: supporting government staff, administrators, directors, and service providers of Shanghai preschool education	Preschool education
Xiumin Hong	BNU	Director, Institute of Preschool Education, Ministry of Education, BNU; Professor	Researcher: participating in the formulation of preschool education policy through subject research, university consultation reports, and so on	Preschool education; educational theory and management; demography and family planning

(continued)

Table 2. (continued)

Name	Unit	Title/position	Identity	Research field
Yong Jiang	ECNU	Professor	Researcher: participating in the formulation of preschool education policy through subject research, government consultation report writing, and so on	Preschool education policy; preschool teacher education
Liping Guo	ECNU	Professor	Researcher: having original opinions on the application of information technology in preschool education	Preschool education; psychology; educational theory and management
Bingcheng Gao	National Institute of Education Sciences	Associate Research Fellow	Researcher; The Institute is a national comprehensive education scientific research institution directly under the Ministry of Education and is the first national education think tank	Preschool education; educational theory and management; educational psychology
Xiaohui Xu	Capital Normal University	Associate Professor	Researcher: paying more attention to the "difficulty of entering the preschool" and education equity	Preschool education; educational theory and management; psychology
Pingzhi Ye	Guangzhou University	Professor	Researcher: holding positions in many academic organizations; member of the state training expert group of the Ministry of Education	Preschool education; higher education; educational theory and educational management
Sujing Zhu	Soong Ching Ling Kindergarten	Director	Practitioner, Researcher: reflecting on problems in preschool education practice through CFA	Preschool education

Note. CFA = China Welfare Institute; ECNU = East China Normal University; BNU = Beijing Normal University.

Table 3. Basic structure of the interview.

Code	Description
Current situation	What do you think of the current development of preschool education in China? What achievements have been made?
Current policies	How does the state stipulate the character, development direction, and basic requirements of preschool education from the perspective of macro-level?
Urgent issues	What are the outstanding problems that need to be solved for the development of China's preschool education?
Policy barrier	What are the main difficulties and obstacles faced by the government and policymakers in promoting the national preschool education? What efforts and attempts need to be made by stakeholders to resolve these difficulties?
Changes and challenges toward 2035	What changes have taken place in the government and policymakers' understanding of the character and functions of preschool education? What new requirements and expectations have been put forward for preschool education toward 2035?
Future planning	In your opinion, what are the future directives on national preschool education development by 2035? How will the role of the government change in the development and management of preschool education? How do you consider the future planning of preschool education development?

Figure 1) their opinions clarify the development concept of public welfare and benefits, embody the product attributes of preschool education public service, reform the educational system and mechanism at its core, make quality improvement as its key focus, emphasize the construction of teaching staff, and take into account the rapid development of information network. A new model of preschool education incorporating Chinese characteristics has been designed to play a leading role in the development plan. The entire planning picture takes into account the contents of macro-, meso-, and microlevels¹ and embodies the unity of concept and practice.

Intelligent class: Information technologies and artificial intelligence

Information technology. The construction of intelligent preschools corresponds to the vision to “accelerate the educational reform in the information age, build an intelligent campus, and build an integrated intelligent teaching, management and service platform” clearly put forward in the text of *China's Education Modernization 2035*. Focusing on the construction of databases and



Figure 1. The Planning of China's preschool education toward 2035.

intelligent preschools, the text emphasizes the cultivation of humanistic qualities in the students and the return of the true essence of education. Following directives can provide guidance in using IT and AI in preschool education.

1. Improve the level of informatization and strengthen the construction of the database

With the development of IT, academic circles are paying increasing attention to the construction and management of children's information databases (Lin & Xu, 2018). Some experts have proposed establishing an electronic information platform system to store each child's scores and carry out data mining work related to children's learning and development research. They have proposed using the data provided by the platform to record, analyze, monitor, and support children's learning and development in the form of "identity authentication." (1) In addition, the experts propose a two-way opening of the data system, strengthening the systematic construction and transformation of government functions, strengthening the legal construction of information management, and ensuring personal information security.

2. Carry out the construction of intelligent preschools and pay attention to the cultivation of humanistic qualities

Information and communication technology (ICT) plays an important role in the construction of intelligent preschools. It has great potential to develop preschool teachers' information literacy, organize educational activities, and stimulate the growth and development of young children. It also plays an important role in the joint education of families and kindergartens (Nazarenko & Andriushchenko, 2019). The 2035 development plan of China's preschool education should focus on the construction of science and innovation centers, strengthen the comprehensive application of artificial intelligence technology in the field of preschool education, carry out the construction of intelligent preschools, and develop intelligent teaching assistant systems. The plan should use intelligent technology to speed up the reform of teaching methods and build a new education system that includes intelligent learning and interactive learning. (2) In addition, it is important to note that when carrying out AI-supported science education for preschool teachers, children, and their parents, attention should be paid to the cultivation of the humanistic spirit in the children. Preschool teachers should also consciously cultivate their own morality, which is rarely mentioned in the existing research.

“Accessible with low prices” services: Balanced development and fair access

Inclusive development. The purpose and motive of preschool education development is to support public welfare and provide accessible preschools with low prices (Hu et al., 2016; Liu, 2009). Out of these set goals, a sufficient number of accessible preschools with low prices has become the focus of policymakers, educational administrators, and scholars. Effective promotion of the construction and development of accessible private preschools with low prices (Zhuang & Cheng, 2012) is also the key goal of *Three-year Action Plans for Preschool Education* in various regions. Following directives can provide guidance in ensuring accessible preschool education.

1. Narrowing the gap between public and accessible private preschools with low prices (3) and promoting the construction of inclusive private preschools

In order to enable the vast majority of children to enjoy inclusive preschool education services, some experts proposed that we should adhere to the policy of integrating public and inclusive preschools, explore the method of calculating the average cost incurred by students in accessible private preschools with low prices, formulate the financial subsidy standard and charging standard, and adopt methods such as water and electricity pricing, land preference, rent reduction and exemption, appointment of public teachers, free teacher training, maintaining education quality, and compensation by awards to transform private preschools. (4) At the same time, we should

ensure that private preschools have the same status as public preschools in classification, grading, evaluation, guidance, teacher training, and professional title evaluation. All regions should carry out the proposed changes step-by-step and ensure orderly promotion by taking into account the actual status of local preschool education.

2. Reforming the grading system of preschools and realizing the balanced development of education

Preschool rating plays an important role in the development of private preschools. However, a vast majority of accessible private preschools with low prices are facing problems with the current grading system (Lei, 2014). Therefore, some experts have proposed canceling the original preschool rating and reward system, reducing parents' preference to high-quality demonstration preschools, and promoting balanced and fair allocation of educational resources. (5) In the specific implementation of the reform in the rating system, we should shorten the evaluation time of preschools, simplify the evaluation process and content, reduce the requirements for summary materials and written work, and adhere to the evaluation concept of "promoting quality by evaluation." (6) In addition, pre-assessment training should be provided to supervisors and assessors to ensure the professionalism of the assessment. (7)

"Developmental" pattern: Optimization and upgradation of institutions and mechanisms
Institutions and mechanisms. The institutions and mechanisms are the bottleneck restricting the development of preschool education and are the fundamental reason behind problems such as the difficulty and high cost of entering preschool (Yu & Liu, 2017). Promoting reforms in the current preschool education system and mechanism is the key to realizing the sustainable development of preschool education and the development of China's preschool education toward 2035, including mechanisms such as policy guarantee, financial guarantee, management guarantee, and social security. (8) At this stage, the supervision system and school system reforms are the key areas to optimize and upgrade the system and mechanism. The following directives can provide guidance in reforming the preschool education system.

1. Reforming the supervision system and liberating teachers

China's Education Modernization 2035 emphasizes the need to improve the system and mechanism of education supervision, improving the authority and effectiveness of education supervision, and stresses that the education management department should issue the preschool education quality evaluation standard (9) as soon as possible. Preschool is the place where preschool education supervision is implemented. We should fully trust and empower the director of

kindergartens to carry out internal innovations. Under the “Internet plus education” ecosystem, we should change the way of supervision and use information technology to build online supervision and assessment platforms to understand the real education and teaching situation in kindergartens. Teachers, parents, principals, evaluators, and education administrative departments can upload information and communicate and interact with each other in real time through the platform. This communication will help to liberate teachers, realize the transparency and humanization of assessment, (10) promote the establishment of a third-party public welfare evaluation institution independent of the government and preschools, select high-quality evaluation institutions through competition, and manage the institutions scientifically. (11)

2. Carrying out reforms in school system and promoting a smooth, stable, and high-quality connection between preschools and primary schools

For the past 2 years, the theme of the national preschool education publicity month focused on the connection between preschools and primary schools. Solving the problem of education transition from kindergarten to primary school has become a major research focus (Yu, 2017). Some experts, in accordance with the existing research, pointed out that to scientifically and effectively solve this problem, it is necessary to integrate resources, open up the system, make preschool teachers follow primary school classes or primary school teachers follow preschool classes, and teach the teachers transitional and balanced allocation of educational resources (Pei, 2015). In areas like Shanghai, where preschool education development is at the forefront of national policy, experts suggest that we can try to reform the school system, change the previous “3 + 5” model of the primary school system, move the first grade of primary school down to preschool, and change it into a “4 + 4” school system. (12) At the same time, a cooperative community of teachers between preschool and primary school should be established to jointly formulate curriculum objectives, contents, and forms for children in their early childhood to help children smoothly realize the transition from preschool to primary school. (13) In addition, the government should formulate practical and coherent policies for preschool and basic education.

“High-quality” platform for talent gathering: A team of talented preschool teachers

Teachers’ development. China has always attached great importance to the construction of preschool teachers’ identities. *Opinions of the State Council on the current development of preschool education (2010)* and *On strengthening the construction of kindergarten teachers (2012)* proposed multiple ways to strengthen the construction of preschool teachers’ identities, such as focusing on teacher training, professional identity, wages and salaries, establishing of professional titles, and so on. *China’s Education Modernization 2035* plan proposed to “build a team of high-quality professional and innovative teachers.” The plan proposed to achieve this goal by

taking into account the actual needs of preschool teachers' development, and strive to improve teachers' political, social, and professional status, and enhance their sense of professional identity and professional well-being. The following directives can provide guidance in preschool teachers' development.

1. Improving the overall salary of preschool teachers, enhancing the value of teacher's qualification certificate, and implementing the teacher identity credit certification system

In order to elevate the quality of preschool teachers, it is necessary to bring reforms in the recruitment system of preschool teachers, implement equal pay for equal work policy, and balance the allocation of educational resources. (14) To improve the treatment and welfare of preschool teachers, we have to raise the minimum wage standard for preschool teachers and ensure that it is basically the same as that of primary and secondary school teachers. It is also important to design plans to double the income of preschool teachers. (15)

Improving the value of preschool teachers' qualification certificates: With the qualification certificate, preschool teachers can avail benefits such as purchasing a house or a car and they can enjoy travel and other benefits. The availing of such benefits enhances the teachers' sense of professional identity. A teacher's qualification certificate is linked with the teacher's morality, which means that a teacher's teaching certificate will be revoked immediately once he/she acts against teaching ethics. (16) With the credit certification of "teacher's identity," we can realize the connection between a teacher's qualification certificate and credit mechanism and standardize teacher's morality.

2. Strengthening the moral construction and professional training of preschool education

Many studies have focused on the participation of preschool teachers in training programs (Hui & Chu, 2015), with few suggesting the idea of appointing an instructional coach. Some experts pointed out that the idea of the appointment of an instructional coach for preschool education should be encouraged and implemented. In the process of selecting an instructional coach, we should abandon the mechanism of selecting an instructional coach only from among practitioners in the education field, and instead should seek the coach from other professional fields. (17) There needs to be a clarification of the division of responsibilities among departments' staff and instructional coaches, an effort to carry out project-based management and reduce the bureaucratic processes of education administration. The training of instructional coaches of preschool education needs to be carried out in a planned way to establish the concept of equality; to realize scientific, efficient, humanized, and comprehensive evaluation in the course of action; (18) and to establish an effective incentive mechanism to link the title evaluation, salary, and bonus of the instruction coach with their scientific research and work achievements.

3. Promoting the diversity of the constitution of preschool teaching staff, innovating the system of teacher training, and strengthening the comprehensive management and cultivation of teachers

The construction of teaching staff is closely related to the training of teachers. These two aspects correspond to the requirements of *China's Education Modernization 2035* for the organic connection to vocational education, connotation development of higher education, and preservice and post-service development. From the perspective of preservice training, we should encourage people of a diverse range of backgrounds to study early childhood education to become preschool teachers, strengthen the cultivation of preschool education major in normal universities, (19) and support the reform and planning of local normal schools. We should also adopt various models such as “3+2” and “3+4” for the enrollment of undergraduate and secondary students in vocational training to train the students as preschool teachers, encourage surplus teachers and normal graduates in primary and secondary schools to enter preschool after professional training, gradually improve the entry threshold of preschool teachers, and form professional preschool teacher teams that consist of full-time undergraduate students. (20) From the point of view of post-service training, we should strengthen post-job training, change training methods, adopt credit systems, and let teachers choose courses according to credit requirements so as to enhance the merit and relevance of teacher training. (21)

“Service-oriented” preschool education system: Open, tolerant, and inclusive

Public service. Opinions of the State Council on the current development of preschool education (2010) proposed to “strive to build a public service system of preschool education covering urban and rural areas with a reasonable layout.” Local governments should focus on building such a public service system as it will continue to be the main area of focus for a period of time in the future. To include the concept of a life-long education development in the construction of public service system of preschool education, it is necessary to uphold an open and inclusive attitude, to pay attention to children with special needs, to pay attention to the needs of children who move with their parents and the left-behind children, and to integrate the nurseries and kindergartens for children aged 0–6 years. The following directives can provide guidance in ensuring that children receive the right to participate in an inclusive preschool education system.

1. Paying attention to the children with special needs and improving the overall level of inclusive education

With the development of information technology, experts have stated that all regions can rely on grid management to gradually smoothen the mechanism of finding and reporting special children,

improve the evaluation system of special children, and refine the classification standards. It can also provide support for the survival, development, and learning of children with special needs by means of the distribution of goods, living subsidies, family guidance, and intervention. (22) It is necessary to improve the rules regarding the implementation of teacher training, accessibility of training, enrollment, and placement related to special children's education. (23) It is important to actively build integrated education demonstration schools and promote the application of artificial intelligence in this field.

2. Guaranteeing the right to receive fair and high-quality preschool education to the children who move with their parents and the left-behind children

With the development of urbanization, the education of children who move with their parents and that of left-behind children has become a major problem in China. By taking into account the experience of relevant regions in the preschool education stage, we can gradually promote the implementation of the policy of "tenants enjoying the same rights as home buyers" in the city, endow the children of the lessee (who fulfill the necessary conditions) the right to enter a nearby preschool, and ensure that all children have the right to receive quality preschool education. At the same time, we should pay close attention to the ratio between population change and resource allocation. This ratio reflects a dynamic adjustment: how to meet the resource demand when the numbers of preschool children are increasing or how to relocate these resources when the number of children decreases to avoid wasting the resources. (24)

3. Establishing community service centers and parent schools for preschool education to meet the diversified parenting needs

We should actively promote the establishment of community service centers for preschool education and further strengthen the overall planning of family education. Similar to existing research (Lv, 2015; Stanova & Mitova, 2015), we should consider the construction of a new mode of joint education for families and kindergartens as an important breakthrough. In areas like Shanghai, where preschool education is relatively advanced, we should try our best to build parent schools. We should make full use of existing resources, improve the preschool education service website platform and resource base, support the development of large-scale public welfare activities for children, and provide comprehensive, detailed, and targeted education services for parents. The effective implementation of these suggestions has now become the focus of the government's attention and research focus.

4. Actively promoting the integration of nurseries and kindergartens for children aged 0–6

With the development of parents' educational concepts and changes in educational service demands, the integration of nurseries and kindergartens for children aged 0–6 has become a new trend. (25) Based on Shanghai's trial of the trend, the experts proposed that in the process of construction of education institutions, we should establish a cooperative operation mechanism between education, health, family planning, and the community. (26) We should strengthen the construction of professional service teams and promote the training of professionals such as nursery teachers, early childhood teachers, child health care teachers, and nutritionists. We should also provide parents with family education instruction manuals for children aged 0–6 to improve their childcare abilities. (27) For children aged 0–3, we should regularly track the performance of early education services in various communities and focus on the quality of parent–child preschools, early education centers, and other institutions. (28) For preschools, we should pay attention to the development of connotation, avoid the development of homogeneity, and advocate personalized development. (29)

Chinese characteristics: A New preschool education model

Characteristic development. At the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, it was put forward that “morality is the fundamental task of education.” Later, the reports of the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China and *China's Education Modernization 2035* and other important documents reaffirmed this important education concept. This concept has far-reaching implications and has been adapted to the requirements of the times (Wu et al., 2019). At the same time, we should build a preschool education development model by incorporating Chinese characteristics, stick to the original aim in the multicultural world wave, increase influence, and show cultural confidence. Following directives can provide guidance in incorporating Chinese characteristics in the preschool education system.

1. Adhering to the fundamental task of moral education and bringing traditional culture into the focus of basic education

We should adhere to the fundamental task of assisting the people to cultivate virtue, taking this task as the basic idea and value orientation of preschool education, and further commit to thinking about what kind of sample morality, values, core literacy, and ability should be cultivated in the children participating in China's preschool education. At the same time, amid the wave of multiculturalism and cultural integration in the world, we should think about how to incorporate Chinese characteristics in the preschool education and increase the popularity of Chinese characteristics by showcasing their advantages to other countries. (30) We should pay special attention to the position

of traditional culture in basic education and focus on the fundamental task of fostering virtue through education. By following the rules of children's learning and development, we should integrate Chinese traditional culture into children's moral education, cultural knowledge education, art and physical education, social practice education, and so on.

2. Facing China's Education Modernization 2035, building a preschool education model with Chinese characteristics

Few studies have mentioned the construction of preschool education model with Chinese characteristics. To promote the development of China's preschool education by 2035, we should think about how to overcome difficulties and to break the bottleneck of preschool education development. Some experts have proposed that we should establish brand awareness, analyze the development trend of preschool education in the world, and summarize the experience, characteristics, and advantages of preschool education development in China. (31) Based on China's situation, using top-level design, we will make key breakthroughs in resource allocation, development structure, system and mechanism, connotation quality, social function, and brand creation. We will build, from the micro to the middle level and then to the macro-level, a preschool education model incorporating Chinese characteristics that adheres to public welfare, openness and diversity, high quality and balance, and which is full of vitality (Samuelsson et al., 2019).

Reflections

One of the advantages of this study is that it brings the important contributions of scholars and experts from different research institutes and universities who are engaged in educational theory and preschool education research to one platform. Based on the analysis and integration of thoughts of 11 experts on the planning of China's preschool education toward 2035, we found that the construction of preschool education model, which incorporates Chinese characteristics, is an important direction for future development. This direction closely focuses on the nature of public welfare's provisions for preschool education (Pang & Han, 2010) to promote the development of inclusive preschool education, focus on the standardized development of preschool education, paying close attention to quality development and the fairness of education, actively building and improving the public service system of preschool education. At the same time, the development of ICT is closely integrated with the development of preschool education under the trend of "Internet plus education."

Based on the achievements and existing problems in the development of preschool education in China, combined with the planning for the development prospects of China's preschool education toward 2035, we propose the following considerations.

Respecting local differences and promoting the development of preschool education step-by-step

As mentioned earlier, there are great differences in the development levels of preschool education in different regions of China. Since there are too many problems in the development of preschool education in China, deep-seated contradictions still exist, as local conditions are special and are closely related to the local funding support level, policy implementation level, and so on (Hong & Jiang, 2018). Thus, we cannot make up for all the past debts all at once. Based on such a situation, the proposed planning scenario is not only far from reality but is also difficult to put into practice. We should respect the development differences of each region, and at the same time, each region should follow the principle of “step-by-step” progress, formulate feasible plans, and implement them in stages and steps. In addition, while solving the existing problems, we should also promote the development of preschool education moderately and allow some regions to experiment first to keep pace with developed countries and their excellent preschool education. We should also allow regions with serious historical arrears to develop preschool education qualitatively and quantitatively so as to avoid a “one size fits all” situation.

Thinking comprehensively and taking advantage of the situation to modernize China’s education

In *China’s Education Modernization 2035*, the development of each education stage is not separated, but connected with each other. The development of preschool education 2035 is closely connected to the development of other education stages. Therefore, we need to comprehensively consider the relationship between education development and preschool education. For example, the connotation development of vocational education and higher education is closely related to the cultivation of preschool teachers and staff at early childhood education institutions. It involves encouraging preschool education students to undertake vocational education. The progress of preschool students to undergraduate and graduate stages is closely related to the output quality of preschool teachers and staff. In addition, *Plan for the Revitalization and Development of the Middle and Western Regions* and “*Three districts and three prefectures*” poverty alleviation plan for deep poverty areas provide opportunities for the development of preschool education. Therefore, the development of preschool education should be based on the background of the development of the times, the policies issued by the state, and taking advantage of various plans to seek a way for the development of preschool education.

Focusing on people’s needs and emphasizing “people-oriented” education

To achieve the goals of preschool education toward 2035, it is necessary to focus on “people-oriented” education. Planning at macro-, meso-, and microlevels is based on the purpose and value

of people (Li & Yang, 2017), which is consistent with the fundamental purpose of the CPC to serve the people wholeheartedly. The foothold of the development of preschool education lies in early childhood and in the needs of early childhood development. Facing 2035, the development of preschool education finally returns to the question “what kind of person to cultivate, how to cultivate, and for whom to cultivate.” To provide “people-oriented” preschool education, the key focus should be to ensure the effective implementation of the policy. The preschool education policies issued in China are more comprehensive. Therefore, connecting policy and practice, truly benefiting the masses, and providing satisfactory preschool education to the people require the political wisdom of governments and the support of kindergartens, parents, and other stakeholders.

Conclusion

In a word, compared with the strategic goals and plans of Preschool Education issued by the world organization or other countries, the key words of “equity,” “quality,” “resources,” and “kindergarten teachers” are also highlighted in the development of China’s preschool education toward 2035, which is consistent with the international trend of the development of quality preschool education (Alieva et al., 2013). At the same time, we should highlight Chinese characteristics in the construction process, actively cooperate with the country to build a moderately prosperous society in 2020, build a modern country in 2050, and adhere to the goal-oriented, reform-oriented, and problem-oriented principle.

Authors’ notes

1. All experts were informed about this study and agreed to give public statements in this article.
2. Suggestions from different experts: (1) Yong Jiang and Liping Guo; (2) Liping Guo; (3) Bingcheng Gao and Xiaohui Xu; (4) Lijuan Pang; (5) Sujing Zhu and Pingzhi Ye; (6) Pingzhi Ye; (7) Xiumin Hong; (8) Lijuan Pang; (9) Xiumin Hong; (10) Yong Jiang; (11) Yong Jiang and Liping Guo; (12) Yong Jiang; (13) Rong He; (14) Sujing Zhu; (15) Yong Jiang and Liping Guo; (16) Sujing Zhu; (17) Sujing Zhu; (18) Rong He; (19) Jinlong Sang; (20) Jianhui Xiong; (21) Liping Guo; (22) Bingcheng Gao; (23) Xiaohui Xu; (24) Xiumin Hong; (25) Bingcheng Gao; (26) Bingcheng Gao and Jinlong Sang; (27) Jianhui Xiong; (28) Xiumin Hong; (29) Jianhui Xiong; (30) Yong Jiang and Xiaohui Xu; (31) Yong Jiang and Liping Guo.

Contributorship

Yong Jiang put forward the research questions, grasped the research framework, finalized the article, and responded to reviewers’ comments. He contacted 11 experts, including policymakers, educational administrators, scholars, and practitioners in the education. Beibei Zhang wrote the article, interviewed some of the experts, organized interview materials, responded to reviewers’ comments, and was responsible for the whole process of the article revision. Ying Zhao participated in the writing of the first draft of the article, interviewed some of the experts, and organized interview materials. Chuchu Zheng interviewed some of the experts, organized interview material, and responded to reviewers’ comments.

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Note

1. The macro-level emphasizes the contents related to thinking from the national level and the overall development of preschool education, such as “Accessible with low prices” services, “Service-oriented” preschool education system and Chinese characteristics: A new preschool education model. The meso-level emphasizes the contents related to institutions and mechanisms, such as optimization and upgradation of institutions and mechanisms. The micro-level emphasizes the contents related to the improvement of kindergarten and its education quality, such as Intelligent class and “High-quality” platform for talent gathering for teachers.

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