

Analysis of the Differences Between Chinese and Western Preschool Education

—The Case Study of China and Finland

Yixuan Li^{1,a,*}

¹*School of Education, Hainan Normal University, Haikou, Hainan, China*

a. 202204090115@hainnu.edu.cn

**corresponding author*

Abstract: Finland ranks first in the world for the quality of education and has a mature education system, a sound education structure and a highly qualified education team. Judging from the current situation, China's basic education has developed rapidly, the allocation of educational resources and government investment has been continuously improved, and the penetration rate of preschool education has increased significantly. However, there are still some problems and deficiencies in some aspects. This paper uses the method of comparative study, mainly from the two countries' preschool education status, preschool education curriculum arrangement and preschool education teachers three aspects of comparison. This paper argues that China's preschool education has deficiencies in the allocation of educational resources and the quality of teachers. Based on this, the following recommendations are put forward in this paper. First of all, China can strengthen policy protection, invest more funds in preschool education, and ensure the educational fairness of children in preschool education. Secondly, China can improve the curriculum standards and integrate various fields into the curriculum of preschool education to promote the all-round development of preschool children. Finally, China can improve the overall level of preschool teachers, focus on developing pre-service teacher training, and improve the quality of preschool education.

Keywords: Current situation of preschool education, preschool curriculum arrangement, preschool education teachers

1. Introduction

Education is an important part of a country, it is related to the future of a country and a nation, and preschool education is the foundation of education, which has been paid more and more attention by the country, society and parents. Despite the rapid development of preschool education in China, there are still shortcomings. According to the "China's Education Modernization 2035" jointly issued by the CPC Central Committee and The State Council, there are still regions in China that do not have a perfect teaching environment and teachers, and there is an uneven distribution of educational hardware and software resources. At the same time, according to the statistics of the Ministry of Education, China's preschool education teachers have a low educational background, leading to the status quo of poor teaching quality [1].

Therefore, China's preschool education needs faster and better development, in how to define "good", and what is "good" preschool education, China needs to have a reference object. According to the study, Finland ranks first in the comprehensive indicators of the quality of preschool education in all aspects [2]. At the same time, the Finnish government invests heavily in preschool education to ensure that educational resources benefit more preschool children and improve the enrollment rate of preschool children. This paper aims to draw inspiration from the comparison of preschool education between the two countries, which will help promote the development of preschool education in China.

It is necessary to take into account the differences in the national conditions of China and Finland. First of all, China's land area is much larger than that of Finland, and different regions have great differences in the natural environment, economic development level, social and cultural background, and so on. And this difference has a certain impact on the development of local education, for example, in the economically developed areas, education resources are relatively rich. In the areas with relatively backward economic development, educational resources are relatively scarce. Secondly, as China is a developing country with a large number of preschool children, there is still a certain gap between the Chinese government and Finland in terms of education investment and allocation of education resources while considering investment in various fields. However, this does not mean that Finland's preschool education has no implications for China, and China can still learn applicable lessons from Finnish education. If China's preschool education can absorb the advantages of Finland's preschool education and combine it with China's national conditions, it will help promote the equity of preschool education resources in China and allow more preschool children to enter schools. Secondly, it helps to improve the overall level of preschool teachers, so that preschool children can enjoy more high-quality educational resources. Finally, it helps to improve the hardware facilities of the school, so that preschool children's vision is more open. Based on this, this paper studies the differences between China and Finland in preschool education.

2. Preschool Education in China

2.1. Current Situation of Preschool Education in China

Preschool education is the foundation stage of individual education but is also related to the nation and the future of the important stage. In recent years, China's funding for preschool education has been increasing year by year. According to the statistics of China's Ministry of Education, in 2016, the total investment in national education was 3,886.6 billion yuan, while the investment in preschool education was only 280.2 billion yuan, accounting for 7.21% [3]. By 2019, the total investment of the national fund will reach 5,017.5 billion yuan, an increase of 11.63% year-on-year. Among them, the investment in preschool education reached 409.9 billion yuan, an increase of 11.63%, the largest growth rate in education at all levels, accounting for 8.17%, and gradually formed, the central, provincial, city, district and county multi-level financial participation in preschool education investment mechanism [3]. At the same time, the funding for each child receiving preschool education increased from 8,626 yuan in 2016 to 11,855 yuan in 2020, with a large increase [3].

With the increase in government funding, the number of kindergartens in China is increasing year by year. According to statistics from China's Ministry of Education, the number of kindergartens increased from 150,000 in 2010 to 267,000 in 2018. Year-on-year growth was 4.6 percent. This means that more preschool resources are available and more children can enter kindergartens to receive preschool education. Indeed, as China continues to increase investment in preschool education, the kindergarten enrollment rate continues to rise. In 2010, the enrollment rate of preschool education in China was only 56.6%, far lower than the level of developed countries and lagging behind the world average, which has become a weak link in China's education system. However, the enrollment rate

of preschool education in China reached 83.4% in 2019, an increase of 1.7 percentage points over 2018 [1].

Although the development trend of preschool education in China is good, there are still some problems. The main problem is the uneven distribution of preschool education resources. In terms of the number of kindergartens, in 2019, the number of urban kindergartens in China was 671,300 and the number of rural kindergartens was 444,700. In terms of the number of full-time teachers, the number of urban full-time teachers is 1,336,400 and the number of rural full-time teachers is 448,400 [3]. In terms of kindergarten hardware facilities, most urban kindergartens have diversified and perfect teaching environments, while rural kindergartens have relatively single teaching environments and lack advanced teaching facilities. At the same time, China's preschool education network has not yet achieved full coverage, such as remote areas, pastures, forests, and other places, these areas have not been equipped with appropriate teaching environments and teachers. It can be seen that there is a big gap in the allocation of preschool education resources between urban and rural areas. Therefore, meeting the needs of the development of preschool education has become the direction of the continued development of China's preschool education [2].

2.2. Chinese Preschool Curriculum Arrangement

Since 2000, China has promulgated many important documents related to preschool education, among which the Outline promulgated in 2001 and the Guide promulgated in 2012 have had a great impact on the preschool education curriculum.

China clearly emphasizes that preschool education is an important part of basic education and the foundation stage of school education and lifelong education. At the same time, the content of children's learning is divided into five areas and the learning objectives of each area are listed. While the Outline does not provide a detailed explanation of each area, the Guide has enriched this content [4]. According to the Guide, the five areas are health, language, social, scientific, and artistic. Among them, the goal of the health field is to make children healthy learn the knowledge of safety and health through kindergarten education, and cultivate children to develop good living habits and self-care abilities. The goal of the field of language is to make children willing to express their views and learn to listen attentively through language education in kindergarten. At the same time, they like literary works and are willing to read stories. The goal of the social field is to make children have the confidence to take the initiative to participate in collective activities, be willing to communicate and take the initiative to help and care for others in activities, and cultivate children's awareness of rules and abide by basic rules of social behavior. The goal of the field of science is to train children to be interested in the things and phenomena around them, have curiosity and exploration spirit, use various senses to feel the things around them, and appropriately explore the world. The goal of the art field is to enable children to initially feel the beauty of life and art, and to learn to use various materials for artistic activities. In particular, there are numerous sub-areas nested in these five target areas, which are divided into age groups and list in detail the learning objectives and contents of children in various stages of development, so that the curriculum objectives of Chinese preschool education can guide teachers in an all-round and detailed way.

Based on the analysis and summary, this paper concludes that China's preschool education curriculum mainly focuses on children's perceptions and attitudes, and has a good balance between emotional experience and skill training, so that children can have fun in the learning process. At the same time, it is of enlightenment significance to pursue the development of children's intelligence and the expansion of knowledge, cultivate the all-round development of children's morality, intelligence, body, beauty, and labor, encourage children to experience and perceive more and promote children's creativity and inquiry.

2.3. Chinese Preschool Teachers

According to data from China's Ministry of Education, the number of full-time kindergarten teachers in China has steadily increased. According to statistics, between 2010 and 2018, the number of teachers increased by 2,682,200 to 4,531,500. Among them, 2,581,400 were full-time teachers, an increase of 1,437,200 over 2010 [1]. While the number of teachers is increasing, the professionalism of kindergarten teachers in China is generally improving. However, at the same time, the educational qualifications of preschool teachers in China are generally low. According to statistics, in 2018, 1,503,600 full-time teachers in preschool education had college degrees or above, but only 23% of teachers had bachelor's degrees or above, and there is still much room for progress [1]. This also reflects from the side that China's preschool teachers have problems such as uneven quality, shortage of teachers, and low quality [2].

Based on the analysis and summary, this paper finds that to improve the overall teaching level of preschool teachers, it not only rely on the recruitment of academic qualifications but also need to have high-quality teacher pre-service training. At present, there are some problems in pre-service training of preschool education in China. First of all, most schools attach great importance to the theoretical education of preschool teachers but do not pay enough attention to practical education, which leads to the failure of pre-service teachers to combine theory with practice [5]. When pre-service teachers enter the service, they cannot convert theoretical knowledge into methods and strategies in the face of actual situations and emergencies, which greatly reduces the teaching quality. Secondly, the assessment and evaluation system for pre-service training of pre-service teachers is not perfect, many pre-service courses are mere formalities and superficial, and many pre-service teachers respond negatively, resulting in insufficient professional knowledge of pre-service education. At the same time, the training forms are relatively simple and lack innovation, which leads to the lack of innovation ability of pre-service teachers in teaching content and teaching mode. Finally, there is a lack of tracking, analysis and services for the performance of pre-service teachers after training. The development of preschool teachers' abilities is continuous, and the cultivation of teachers' core qualities takes a long time. At the same time, the problems encountered in the teaching process are diverse and special, and they need to constantly learn theoretical knowledge and practical experience. Therefore, supplementary services after pre-service teacher training are of great importance [6].

3. Preschool Education in Finland

3.1. Current Situation of Preschool Education in Finland

Since the 20th century, Finland has gradually reformed its education system. According to OECD statistics, education in Finland will account for 6.84% of GDP in 2020, ranking second only to social welfare expenditure. At the same time, the Finnish government spends \$16,016 per child attending preschool, ranking sixth in the world [7].

The Finnish government vigorously develops preschool education and ensures the fairness of educational resources, so it takes into account whether preschool children in every region have access to preschool education, including preschool children in remote areas. By 2020, Finland's kindergarten enrollment rate for 3-year-olds will reach 85%, 4-year-olds 88%, and 5-year-olds 92%, maintaining a relatively high percentage overall [8].

3.2. Finnish Preschool Curriculum Arrangement

According to a research report published by the Economist Intelligence Unit in 2012, Finland ranks first in the comprehensive indicators of the quality of preschool education in all aspects [9]. To meet the needs of the comprehensive development of preschool children, the Finnish government has

clearly stated that preschool education is composed of three parts. The first part is childcare, the main purpose of childcare is to provide a good educational foundation for preschool children, which focuses on the physical and mental healthy development of preschool children, the formation of good personality and whether to form a correct outlook on life. The second part is education. Finland's preschool education divides the field of study into six directions: mathematics, natural science, history and society, aesthetics, ethics and morality, and religion and philosophy. These six directions generally require preschool children to have basic mathematical knowledge and natural ecological knowledge, cherish and care for the environment and animals and plants, but also to understand the history of the country, cultivate preschool children's patriotism and love the people's spirit, but also to cultivate preschool children's aesthetic ability, cultivate preschool children to form a correct ethic and enlighten preschool children's religious philosophy consciousness. The third part is the teaching part, Finnish preschool education usually takes a variety of teaching forms, first for the teacher, the teacher imparts relatively simple knowledge. The second is group activities. The students in the class are divided into several groups for discussion, which helps preschool children exercise their communication skills and the ability to think independently. Finally, independent games, so that preschool children exercise in the game, and develop the ability to observe new things and explore new things [2].

Finland's curriculum arrangement is conducive to focusing on cultivating preschool children's abilities in various aspects, and the appropriate integration of the three parts is conducive to promoting the all-round development of preschool children.

3.3. Finnish Preschool Teachers

With the continuous reform of Finnish education, the Finnish government is aware of the importance of improving the quality of teachers. Therefore, the Finnish government has higher requirements for preschool education staff advocates higher technical education for preschool teachers, and develops professional courses with characteristics according to their professional needs. First of all, the professional courses are highly practical and can be used to solve the different situations occurring in the teaching process. Secondly, professional courses have a strong technical nature, which can let teachers skillfully use preschool teaching equipment and solve the problems in the process of preschool teaching. Finally, preschool education teachers need to learn vocational special education courses. Preschool education teachers should not only learn professional preschool education knowledge, but also learn the related content of special education, and master the teaching skills needed by special children among preschool children. In addition to ensuring high-quality pre-service teacher training, Finnish preschool education requires high academic qualifications for teachers. Most preschool teachers in Finland have a bachelor's degree, and some even require a master's degree [2]. At the same time, the Finnish government provides strong support for preschool educators, and since 2010, the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture has invested nearly half of its original funds in Finnish educators. In addition, Finland allocates about 33% of the funds for three to ten days of on-the-job training for preschool workers, depending on the needs of preschool education and the level of preschool educators in the country. In doing so, the Finnish government has greatly improved the quality of Finnish preschool teachers and strengthened the strength of Finnish preschool education.

4. Enlightenment

4.1. Strengthen Policy Support

In this regard, the most important problem in China's preschool education is the uneven distribution of educational resources. This requires the cooperation of many parties, including the deployment of educational resources by the state, and the implementation of targets by relevant departments through

finance. In terms of teacher strength, the Chinese government needs to increase funds to train high-quality teachers for preschool education, improve the salaries and welfare benefits of preschool teachers, ensure that preschool teachers can focus on their work, and import high-level talents for rural preschool education. At the same time, the relevant institutions of preschool education should strengthen the preschool education budget, supervise the use of funds, use every investment in actual needs, ensure the educational equity of all children in preschool education, and promote the sustainable development of the national preschool education cause [10].

4.2. Improve Curriculum Standards

In the current situation of the development of preschool education in China, relevant preschool education institutions should improve the local preschool education curriculum standards based on the implementation of national preschool education curriculum standards. Preschool education should pay attention to children's moral, intellectual, physical, beauty, labor all-round development, physical and mental health development, and positive education guidance [2]. On this basis, preschool education teachers should take into account the different needs of different children, enrich the preschool curriculum content, and develop a personalized preschool curriculum in addition to the comprehensive organization of health, language, social, science and art education content, to promote the comprehensive development and sustainable development of children [11].

4.3. Improve the Quality of Teachers

In the construction of preschool teachers in Finland, there are many things that China can learn from. According to the data analysis above, Finnish preschool teachers are of higher quality. For one thing, Finnish pre-school teachers have higher qualifications. On the other hand, Finland pays more attention to the pre-service training of teachers and invests more in it. Therefore, in the development of preschool education, China can first strengthen teacher ability training and improve the overall teacher strength. China's preschool education should pay attention to the integration of teachers' pre-service and post-service education and the gender balance of teachers. Secondly, it is necessary to pay attention to improving the professionalism of school educators, to deal with the diversity problems in the teaching and management process, and at the same time, to enrich the teaching content and improve the quality of education. Based on the characteristics of preschool students, there will be diverse problems in learning and life, and it is difficult for teachers of different majors to solve all the problems of different types [12]. Therefore, different types of teachers can be assigned according to the nature of the work content of preschool education. For example, professors complete the professional teaching and psychological guidance of students. The life teacher solves the basic problems of the student's life, etc. Finally, improve the salary of preschool teachers, reduce the economic pressure on preschool teachers, and enhance the career attractiveness of preschool teachers.

5. Conclusion

Through research, this paper finds that China's preschool education has developed significantly in recent years, while Finland's preschool education has maintained a high level of development. Through the comparison between China and Finland, this paper finds differences in preschool education between China and Finland. From the current situation of preschool education in the two countries, the Finnish government's investment in preschool education is higher than that of the Chinese government, and the enrollment rate of preschool children is also higher than that of China. At the same time, China's preschool education has the problem of uneven distribution of resources, such as the difference between urban and rural areas. From the perspective of preschool curriculum, both China and Finland set relevant curriculum objectives from the perspective of preschool children

themselves. Promote the comprehensive development of preschool children in health, language and society. In terms of preschool teachers, the quality of Finnish preschool teachers is higher than that of Chinese teachers. There is room for improvement in China, whether it is the teacher's education or the teacher's previous training. In the face of the above research results, this paper gets some enlightenment, which can better promote the development of preschool education in China. China can increase funding for preschool education, to balance the differences in educational resources in different places and enable more preschool children to receive education. At the same time, China can improve the academic qualifications of the teachers and the quality of pre-service training for preschool teachers to improve the overall level of preschool teachers.

The main contribution of this paper is to compare preschool education between China and Finland and draw conclusions and enlightenment. It is beneficial to improve the universality and quality of China's preschool education and promote the development of China's preschool education.

References

- [1] Wei, T. (2020). *The Development Status of Preschool Education in China The National Financial Investment in Preschool Education has been Increased*. Retrieved from <https://www.qianzhan.com/analyst/detail/220/2002269df81bc7.html>
- [2] Du, H. M. (2018). *A Study of EU Pre-School Education Policy in the 21st Century*. Guilin: Guangxi Normal University.
- [3] Chen, H. (2020). *Analysis of the Investment Scale and Development Trend of China's Preschool Education Industry in 2020*. Retrieved from <https://www.qianzhan.com/analyst/detail/220/201030-26f5e005.html>
- [4] Cai, X. P. (2018). *A Comparative Study of Preschool Education Curriculum in China and the United Kingdom*. Fuzhou: Fujian Normal University.
- [5] Bredekamp, S. and Joseph, G. E. (2023). *Effective Practices in Early Childhood Education: Building a Foundation*. Pearson. One Lake Street, Upper Saddle River, New Jersey, 07458.
- [6] Qin, S. P. and Yu, Y. M. (2022). *The Core Literacy of Preschool Education Teachers and Their Integrated Training before and after Service*. *Research on Continuing Education*, 280(12), 63-68.
- [7] OECD. (2023). *Education Spending*. Retrieved from <https://data.oecd.org/eduresource/education-spending.htm>
- [8] OECD. (2023). *Enrolment Rate in Early Childhood Education*. Retrieved from <https://data.oecd.org/students/enrolment-rate-in-early-childhood-education.htm>
- [9] Unit, E. I. (2012). *Starting Well. Benchmarking Early Education across the World. A Report from the Economist Intelligence Unit. Commissioned by the Lien Foundation*. Retrieved August 30, 2014.
- [10] Abdurahimovna, B. Z. and Zaynalobidinovna, K. M. (2023). *Reforms in the Preschool Education System and Their Effective Results*. *Open Access Repository*, 4(3), 1042-1047.
- [11] Feng, Y. (2016). *A Comparative Study of Chinese Pre-primary Education Curriculum in Singapore*. Chengdu: China West Normal University.
- [12] Blömeke, S., Jenßen, L., Grassmann, M., Duneckacke, S. and Wedekind, H. (2017). *Process Mediates Structure: The Relation between Preschool Teacher Education and Preschool Teachers' Knowledge*. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 109(3), 338.