

Hot Topics and Trend Evolution in China's Preschool Education Research — An Analysis Based on the Reprint of the Recent Edition of “Introduction to Early Childhood Education (Education Science Edition)” by the Renmin University of China Reprinted Journal Materials

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Abstract: Analysis of articles reprinted from the “Introduction to Early Childhood Education (Education Science Edition)” published by Renmin University of China Reprinted Periodicals reveals that recent research hotspots in preschool education primarily focus on fundamental theories, preschool policies, preschool curricula and teaching practices, preschool teachers, preschool children, family education, and comparative education. Future research should further concentrate on areas such as simulations of free preschool education, integrated childcare services, in-depth assessments of care and education quality, along with localized educational practices, evaluation of kindergarten care and education quality, early childhood-to-primary school transition, and family education.

Keywords: “Introduction to Early Childhood Education (Education Science Edition)”; Preschool education; Hot topics

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1. Introduction

The “Reproduced Journal Materials: Introduction to Early Childhood Education (Education Science Edition)” published by Renmin University of China is an educational journal featuring reprinted articles with significant theoretical relevance. By analyzing recent articles reprinted in this journal, one can gain insights into current hot topics in preschool education research and anticipate future research trends.

2. Overview of reprints of preschool education papers in recent years

2.1. Analysis of reprints in source journals

In recent years, “Introduction to Early Childhood Education (Education Science Edition)” has reprinted a total of 97 papers, published in 53 journals (**Table 1**). “Preschool Education Research” topped the list with an advantage of 10 reprints, demonstrating its influence and recognition in the field of preschool education; both “Journal of Shaanxi Preschool Normal University” and “China Journal of Education” each had 5 reprints; “Comparative Education Research,” “Journal of Education,” and “Research on Education and Teaching” each received 4 reprints; journals such as “Teacher Education Research” and “Educational Research” each garnered 3 reprints. These journals collectively accounted for 47 reprints, representing 48.45% of the annual total. Journals like “Northeast Normal University Journal: Philosophy and Social Sciences Edition” each had 2 reprints, while the remaining journals each received only 1 reprint.

Table 1. Reprinting status of source journals

Source Journal Name	Repost Volume	Source Journal Name	Repost Count
Research on Preschool Education	10	Journal of Jiangsu Second Normal University	1
Journal of Shaanxi Preschool Teachers College	5	Educational Measurement and Evaluation	1
China Journal of Education	5	Education Guide Magazine	1
Comparative Education Research	4	educational science	1
Journal of Education	4	Research on the History of Education	1
Education and Teaching Research	4	Education and Culture Forum	1
Research on Teacher Education	3	scientific development	1
Academic Education Monthly	3	Journal of Aesthetic Education	1
Educational Research	3	Nanjing University of Social Sciences	1
Educational Research and Experimentation	3	Journal of Inner Mongolia Normal University: Education Science Edition	1
China Special Education	3	Research on Children and Adolescents	1
Northeast Normal University Journal: Philosophy and Social Sciences Edition	2	Research on Social Development	1
Gansu Social Sciences	2	Social Construction	1
Journal of East China Normal University: Education Science Edition	2	Journal of Capital Normal University: Social Sciences Edition	1
Research on Educational Development	2	sports and science	1
Educational Science Research	2	Foreign Education Research	1
Research on Open Education	2	Journal of Northwest Normal University: Social Sciences Edition	1
Research on Ethnic Education	2	Modern Education Series	1
Research on Preventing Juvenile Delinquency	2	Journal of Psychology	1
Journal of Comparative Education	1	psychical research	1
Contemporary Educational Science	1	New Child Research	1
Contemporary Education Forum	1	Academic Exploration	1
law	1	Early Childhood Education (Educational Science)	1
Journal of Fujian Normal University: Philosophy and Social Sciences Edition	1	Zhejiang Social Sciences	1
Journal of Guizhou University: Social Sciences Edition	1	China Exam	1

Source Journal Name	Repost Volume	Source Journal Name	Repost Count
Journal of Hebei Normal University: Education Science Edition	1	China Youth Social Sciences	1
Journal of Educational Sciences, Hunan Normal University	1		

2.2. Analysis of the first author's affiliation

2.2.1. Publication records of the first author's affiliated institution

In recent years, the book “Introduction to Early Childhood Education (Education Science Edition)” has featured 90 first authors of preschool education papers from 54 universities and institutions. Beijing Normal University led with 11 reprinted papers (11.34%), followed by East China Normal University with 7, Central China Normal University and Nanjing Normal University each with 6, Southwest University with 5, and Northeast Normal University and Hunan Normal University each with 4. Analysis reveals that universities produce a higher volume of reprinted papers in preschool education, reflecting their robust research output achieved through established research teams and well-defined research directions.

2.2.2. Regional distribution of the first author's affiliated institutions

In recent years, the first authors of preschool education papers reprinted in “Introduction to Early Childhood Education (Education Science Edition)” hail from 19 provinces and municipalities in China, with one each from the United States and Japan. Domestically, the contributions are primarily concentrated in Beijing (23 papers), Jiangsu (13 papers), Shanghai (9 papers), Hubei (6 papers), Hunan (6 papers), and Jilin (6 papers). Geographically, these publications are predominantly located in eastern and central regions, indicating robust research activity in preschool education there. Leveraging local universities and research institutions, numerous high-quality papers have been produced, resulting in a correspondingly high number of reprints.

3. Hot topics in preschool education research and key perspectives

By examining the section structure of “Introduction to Early Childhood Education (Education Science Edition)” and the perspectives of the authors whose works were reprinted, it becomes evident that recent republished papers primarily focus on several key areas: fundamental theories of preschool education, preschool education policies, preschool curricula and teaching practices, preschool teachers, preschool children, family education, and comparative education.

3.1. Basic theoretical research on preschool education

Research on fundamental theories of preschool education focuses on its distinctive characteristics and the transition from preschool to primary school. The “preschool nature”, as the foundational stage of human development, holds unique value, manifesting distinct features compared to other educational phases. A thorough understanding of this preschool essence serves as the logical starting point for educational reform and a cornerstone for respecting children's innate qualities. As a core mission of preschool education, the preschool-primary transition not only facilitates smooth adaptation to elementary school life but also promotes children's sustainable development. To achieve this, efforts should advance through dual approaches: cultivating “prepared children” and establishing “prepared schools,” helping children develop self-awareness and reclaim their central role in education. Labor education has become integral to talent development across all educational stages, including kindergartens. For over a century, fostering young children's labor awareness has remained the enduring core of kindergarten labor education. Accordingly, such education should integrate care, teaching, and hands-on learning, innovate practical activities, and refine evaluation systems.

3.2. Research on preschool education policies

Research on policies can provide a basis for educational administrative departments to formulate relevant policies. Establishing a high-quality preschool education indicator system with China's distinctive characteristics is crucial for addressing the three fundamental questions of education. Based on empirical studies, some researchers have proposed a framework for a quality indicator system encompassing values, conditions, processes, and outcomes, with particular emphasis on factors such as context, inputs, and outputs. Regarding policies for public kindergartens, researchers analyzing the evolution of their institutional mechanisms and policies from the early years after the founding of the People's Republic of China to the early 21st century have recommended improving the management systems, funding mechanisms, and teacher governance frameworks for public kindergartens. For policies concerning inclusive private kindergartens, researchers conducting national-level and provincial-level (30 provinces/municipalities) studies have identified issues and underlying causes in accreditation, support measures, and regulatory evaluation, proposing strategies such as clarifying government responsibilities, refining accreditation policies and oversight mechanisms, and exploring social financing models. Amid adjustments to population policies, how can inclusive childcare services be implemented and ensured? Some researchers advocate leveraging legal frameworks to facilitate a synergistic interaction among government governance, market regulation, and social participation, thereby fostering a collaborative, shared, and mutually beneficial childcare service delivery system.

3.3. Preschool curriculum and teaching research

3.3.1. Research on kindergarten activities

Process quality serves as the core criterion for evaluating the quality of kindergarten daily activities. Through questionnaire surveys, expert interviews, and validity and reliability assessments, it has been demonstrated that evaluating process quality across indicators such as routine procedures, teacher-child interactions, and teacher care is appropriate. Early childhood programming education, as an intelligence development curriculum, has quietly gained traction in certain regions; it fosters children's inquiry and imagination skills. The programming curriculum framework should be child-centered, integrating children's daily life contexts and content, and completing a series of "levels" through gamified approaches.

3.3.2. Research on children's play

Games constitute a fundamental concept in early childhood education. In this era of rapid technological advancement, it is essential to move beyond the one-sided view of treating games merely as "tools" and instead fully comprehend the relationship between childhood and play, facilitating a shift from passive to autonomous participation among children. Folk games, characterized by their strong local relevance and high entertainment value, are particularly favored by children. Through these games, children can experience the charm of culture and the beauty of life. Consequently, educators should skillfully identify folk games rooted in everyday life, create dedicated play spaces, restore children's central role in play, and help them appreciate the joy of play and the wisdom of their ancestors. Some researchers propose micro-drama games as an effective vehicle for fostering children's confidence, cooperation, and integrity. Their implementation should follow a structured process: situational introduction → musical engagement → story creation → dramatic performance → teacher reflection.

3.4. Research by preschool teachers

3.4.1. Research on educational and care strategies for preschool teachers

Nursing and educational skills are essential competencies for early childhood educators, determining the quality of their teaching practices. Researchers employing the Bookmark Method suggest designing tiered training programs tailored to teachers' developmental levels and specific pedagogical capabilities, rather than adopting a one-size-fits-all approach, to ensure effective teacher training. Surveys reveal that preschool teachers face challenges such as inadequate understanding of policy documents and limited implementation methods when implementing the "de-prioritized primary school-

style” strategy, exhibiting three behavioral patterns: fidelity-oriented, contingency-oriented, and risk-averse. Therefore, kindergartens should be encouraged to pursue policy-adaptive innovations while strengthening evaluations of the strategy’s effectiveness. Amid the current implementation of China’s “three-child policy,” it is crucial to establish a core competency framework for childcare educators — positioning them as guides, learners, reflectors, and practitioners — to better support infant and toddler development.

3.4.2. Research on the professional status of preschool teachers

In kindergarten teaching staff, a significant proportion remain non-regular employees who contribute substantially to instructional and competition activities. Research indicates substantial disparities in compensation between non-regular and regular teachers: although non-regular educators bear equivalent workloads, the pay gap increases their turnover rates. Therefore, it is essential to refine personnel employment management systems, optimize fiscal allocation mechanisms, and improve staffing regulations to ensure the sustainable development of preschool education. To enhance retention among teachers in inclusive kindergartens, barriers to professional advancement must be removed, equal pay for equal work ensured, and psychological stress among educators alleviated. Due to regional environmental factors and language barriers, migrant teachers often have limited tenure; thus, supporting policies (including housing and spouse benefits), professional development initiatives, and incentives to sustain teaching commitment are crucial for advancing preschool education in ethnic regions. For rural kindergarten teachers, reducing workloads, improving compensation, and creating supportive working environments are vital for retention. Studies demonstrate that workload significantly impacts teacher career development; consequently, robust social support systems and workload management strategies should be implemented to prevent career withdrawal under excessive workloads.

3.5. Child research

Through play and interactions with loved ones, children develop their initial perceptions of the external world. The essence of child education lies in nurturing children’s intrinsic awareness, enabling them to experience the truth, goodness, and beauty of things while achieving physical and mental fulfillment. In recent years, with the introduction of child philosophy research, scholars have focused on young children to explore the emerging philosophical insights during childhood. Children’s questioning of questions often marks the inception of child philosophy, though such philosophies remain largely fragmented and one-sided. Educators must protect children’s curiosity and desire for exploration. Currently, the age at which children use electronic devices is steadily decreasing; studies show a positive correlation between screen time and early reading abilities. Guardians should regulate children’s digital usage, foster family reading environments, and support their learning and development. The transition from preschool to elementary school represents a developmental shift where children undergo phases of anticipation, adjustment, and adaptation. Educators should intervene promptly to manage negative emotions, helping children embrace primary school learning with positivity.

4. Future prospects for preschool education research

By integrating the report of the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China with the national policy documents on preschool education, this study reviews the content of articles reprinted from “Introduction to Early Childhood Education (Education Science Edition)” and outlines cutting-edge themes in preschool education research.

4.1. Evaluation of kindergarten education and care quality

The report of the 20th National Congress emphasized efforts to ensure quality childcare and establish a high-standard education system. The “Guidelines for Assessing the Quality of Kindergarten Care and Education” issued by the Ministry of Education provides detailed requirements for each evaluation criterion and key indicator. The issuance of these guidelines not only establishes a scientific foundation for preschool education assessment but also charts the course

for future development in this field ^[1]. Assessment should not merely involve compiling quantitative data; its purpose is to focus on children themselves ^[2]. Researchers and frontline educators must collaborate to advance evidence-based evaluations of kindergarten care and education quality, highlighting that this stage forms the cornerstone of lifelong learning and serves as a nurturing environment for child development. Additionally, regional disparities must not be overlooked — China’s geographical divisions into eastern, central, and western regions encompass both urban and rural areas, compounded by cultural variations among ethnic groups. Therefore, developing assessment indicators tailored to these regional characteristics requires concerted efforts from all stakeholders in early childhood education.

4.2. Transition from kindergarten to primary school

The transition from kindergarten to primary school is a widely discussed topic in early childhood education. On March 30, 2021, the Ministry of Education issued the “Guiding Opinions on Promoting a Scientific Transition Between Kindergarten and Primary School” (hereinafter referred to as the “Guiding Opinions”), providing educational recommendations for kindergarten enrollment preparation and primary school adaptation. “In recent years, the Ministry has consistently focused its Early Childhood Education Promotion Month on facilitating a scientific transition between kindergarten and primary school, highlighting the national emphasis on this initiative. However, in practice, kindergartens often take the lead by organizing senior class visits to primary school environments, classroom layouts, and teaching methods to simulate first-grade classroom atmospheres and help children adapt prematurely, while primary schools rarely participate, becoming passive beneficiaries ^[3].” How can an effective two-way transition be achieved? Specifically, how can primary schools proactively collaborate with kindergartens rather than merely responding passively? Additionally, measures should be taken to prevent the phenomenon of “primary-schoolization” during the transition process, a topic requiring thorough research.

4.3. Family education

Family education marks the beginning of an individual’s educational journey, with parents serving as the primary “teachers” in this process. Since its enactment, the Family Education Promotion Law of the People’s Republic of China has further clarified parental responsibilities, including what and how parents should teach, providing robust institutional safeguards for the legal framework of family education and elevating it from a domestic matter to a national priority ^[4]. The report to the 20th National Congress also emphasized enhancing societal civility and strengthening family education and values cultivation. However, current family education in China still faces challenges such as the prevalence of utilitarian thinking, insufficient coordination with school education, and inadequate parental self-cultivation ^[5]. Given the complexity of family dynamics, particularly for children from single-parent households or those whose parents work away from home, effectively implementing family education content and methods requires further exploration by researchers.

Disclosure statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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