

The Current Situation, Causes and Countermeasures of the Trend of Primary Schoolization (Abnormalization) in Early Childhood Education

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Abstract: Currently, there is a serious "primary schoolization" tendency in the field of early childhood education, characterized by the distorted reconstruction of the curriculum system, the mechanical operation of teaching practices, and the instrumental shift in home-school interaction, which has many negative impacts on children's physical and mental development. By analyzing the current manifestations and multiple causes of this phenomenon, this paper proposes systematic solutions from five dimensions: policy supervision, curriculum reform, home-school co-education, the transition between kindergarten and primary school, and the social environment, aiming to promote the return of early childhood education to its essence of "child-centeredness" and create a favorable environment for children's healthy growth.

Keywords: Early Childhood Education; Primary Schoolization; Transition between Kindergarten and Primary School; Home-School Co-Education

1. Introduction

The current preschool education field is facing a severe structural imbalance problem - the "primary schoolization" tendency in early childhood education has shown a large-scale spread trend [1]. From a cultural root perspective, the traditional educational concept of "the earlier one starts learning, the smarter one becomes" and the historical inertia of the imperial examination system have led society to form a cognitive bias that "the earlier the start and the more content, the better the educational effect". At the same time, the competitive pressure in the basic education stage continues to be transmitted to the preschool education field. Some primary schools set implicit admission thresholds, forcing kindergartens to conduct advanced knowledge teaching, posing a potential threat to the healthy development of the educational ecosystem.

2. The Current Situation of the "Primary Schoolization" (Abnormalization) Tendency in Early Childhood Education

2.1 The Alienated Reconstruction of the Curriculum System

The inclusion of advanced curricular content is a central feature of the schoolification trend. In the preschool education stage, the subject knowledge system of lower grades in primary school is largely advanced. In the senior classes of kindergartens, phonetic spelling training, addition and subtraction operations within 20, and Chinese character writing teaching are commonly conducted. Some institutions even introduce English grammar rule teaching and early mathematics courses, teaching simple permutation and combination and logical reasoning content, which is completely beyond the cognitive load range of 3-6-year-old children [2].

The formalization tendency in activity organization seriously deviates from the essence of early childhood education. The daily course arrangement in kindergartens mechanically imitates the structure of primary school timetables, with each class period extended to 30-40 minutes, replacing the originally game-led 15-20 minute flexible activity units. Outdoor activity time is compressed to less than 1 hour per day on average, far below the 2-hour standard stipulated in the "Guidelines for the Learning and Development of Children Aged 3-6". Moreover, the activity content is limited to military-style management forms such as queue training, losing its exploratory and interesting nature. The space for

free play is severely squeezed, and autonomous activities such as role-playing and block building are replaced by theme-based teaching. Teachers dominate the entire activity process, and children lose their right to make independent choices.

2.2 The mechanistic implementation of Teaching Practice

The disciplinary tendency in classroom management creates a repressive learning environment. Kindergartens generally adopt a primary school-style discipline management model, requiring children to maintain a fixed sitting posture with hands behind their backs and bodies straight. Punishments such as standing in the corner and deducting "little red flowers" are imposed on those who violate discipline.

The indoctrination tendency in teaching methods has completely changed the educational form of kindergartens. Group teaching has replaced game activities as the main teaching form, forcing children to sit still and listen for long periods. The one-way indoctrination model from teacher to child dominates. On average, children have only 28 minutes of free play time per day, far below the international recommended standard of 120 minutes, while teacher-led group teaching time is as high as 180 minutes, accounting for more than 60% of the effective activity time in kindergartens. This teaching arrangement is fundamentally in conflict with the 5-15 minute attention span of 3-6-year-old children, leading to low learning efficiency and a decline in interest.

The task-oriented variation of game activities has eroded their educational value. Free exploration in autonomous games has been transformed into task-oriented games. Teachers present activity goals and operation steps, requiring children to complete them according to the procedures. For example, in a hospital role-playing activity, teachers stipulate that children must strictly follow the standardized process of "registration, consultation, and medication", with each step having a "standard answer", completely restricting children's imagination.

2.3 The instrumental shift in Home-School Interaction

The test-oriented inclination of family education goals has distorted the essence of parent-child interaction. Parents narrow early childhood education to the early acquisition of knowledge and skills, overly focusing on quantifiable indicators such as children's vocabulary and arithmetic ability, while neglecting the core value of games in social and emotional development. Some parents require their children to complete exercises at the primary school level, transforming family education into an extension of school teaching.

The one-way operation of the home-school collaboration mechanism increases the burden on families. Kindergartens assign written homework to parents through WeChat groups and other channels, such as copying pinyin and arithmetic exercises, and require parents to check and sign, turning parent-child interaction into an academic inspection process. Parents are forced to play the role of teaching assistants, and the original playtime with their children is squeezed by mechanical homework tutoring, leading to children's resistance to learning.

The didactic tendency in parent-child interaction suppresses children's subjectivity development. Parents generally adopt a one-way teaching model like teachers, such as forcing children to recite ancient poems or English words, rather than promoting language development through dialogue, shared reading of picture books, etc.

Furthermore, the phenomenon of early academicization is not unique to China. Countries such as the United States and the United Kingdom have also witnessed similar trends, often driven by performance-based accountability systems and parental pressure for early achievement. However, many of these nations have initiated systemic reforms—such as play-based curricula in Finland and developmental readiness assessments in Sweden—to counteract the negative impacts. Learning from these international examples could provide valuable insights for China's efforts to reorient early childhood education toward developmental appropriateness and holistic growth.

3. Analysis of the Causes of Kindergarten Primary Schoolization

3.1 Social structural pressure: Dual drive of anxiety transmission and cognitive bias

The intergenerational transmission of educational anxiety forms the social psychological basis of the primary schoolization tendency. Commercial institutions create cognitive biases by abusing

neuroscientific discourse, such as "3-6 years old is the golden period for brain development", making most parents mistakenly believe that the earlier children learn to read, the higher their IQ will be, despite the lack of scientific empirical support for this conclusion. This constructed cognitive bias becomes the ideological root driving the spread of primary schoolization [3].

The feedback effect of the labor market strengthens the motivation for early learning. The "Matthew effect" in basic education makes the short-term correlation between early knowledge preparation and later academic performance infinitely magnified. Tracking data from a key primary school shows that students who knew 300 characters at the time of enrollment still maintained leading grades in the third grade. This "first-mover advantage" is misinterpreted by parents as long-term competitiveness.

3.2 The utilitarian logic of kindergarten operation: Dual squeeze of market competition and resource constraints

The survival paradox of private education promotes the spread of primary schoolization. Under the background of marketization of preschool education, private kindergartens face the dual dilemma of "quality-benefit" [4]. A private kindergarten principal admitted: "We also know that games are important, but when parents inquire, the first question they ask is whether we teach pinyin and arithmetic. If we say no, they turn around and leave." This survival pressure makes many private kindergartens abandon their educational ideals and yield to the utilitarian demands of parents.

The professional predicament of the teaching staff exacerbates teaching alienation. A 2024 report by a preschool education research association pointed out that the proportion of non-teacher background teachers in kindergartens has reached one-third, and these teachers generally lack knowledge of child development psychology and tend to adopt structured and easily quantifiable teaching methods [5].

3.3 Institutional Obstacles to Policy Implementation: Dual Constraints of Weak Supervision and Poor Coordination

The formal operation of the supervision mechanism weakens policy effectiveness. In the evaluation system for kindergartens, the inspection of teaching content is mostly completed through document review, forming a "document governance" model.

Institutional obstacles in the transition from kindergarten to primary school maintain market demand. Although the Ministry of Education has explicitly prohibited primary schools from holding entrance examinations, most parents report that key primary schools still test children's abilities in disguised forms such as "parent interviews" and "trial classes". In addition, there is a significant lag in teachers' cognition. A survey by a teacher development center shows that half of primary school teachers believe that "kindergartens should teach addition and subtraction within 20", and this expectation is transmitted to kindergartens through home-school communication, becoming an indirect driver of the primary schoolization tendency.

4. Systemic Governance Countermeasures for the Primary Schoolization of Early Childhood Education

In response to the multi-dimensional causes and practical manifestations of the primary schoolization of early childhood education, it is imperative to establish a "five-in-one" comprehensive governance system encompassing "policy, curriculum, home, transition, and society", and promote the return of preschool education to its child-centered essence through institutional innovation, professional support, and cultural reshaping.

4.1 Improve the policy supervision system and strengthen institutional rigid constraints

Establishing a dynamic supervision mechanism is the institutional foundation for curbing primary schoolization. The mechanism should set up a national unified platform for monitoring the quality of kindergarten curricula, integrating multi-source information such as video analysis of teaching activities, parent feedback data, and children's development assessments, and set up an intelligent early warning threshold for primary schoolization behaviors. The education administrative department, in collaboration with early childhood education experts, should form a special inspection team to conduct on-site inspections through unannounced and random spot checks, focusing on verifying the consistency between actual teaching content and the published curriculum schedule. Inspection results

should be included in the kindergarten's credit file and made public. The education administrative department should establish a hierarchical progressive penalty mechanism: For the first violation, the department will conduct a talk and rectification and require a deadline for re-examination; for the second violation, it will issue a regional public reprimand and reduce government subsidies; if the violation occurs three times consecutively, it will also revoke the license of the kindergarten, thus forming a complete regulatory chain of "discovery - intervention - punishment".

Improving incentive and guidance policies can stimulate the internal motivation of kindergartens. The education administrative department can set up a provincial "scientific care and education" special reward fund, providing an additional 20% subsidy per student to kindergartens that adhere to game-based teaching and achieve significant results. The funds should be specifically used for the purchase of play and teaching materials, the creation of game environments, and teacher training. The education administrative department should incorporate the effectiveness of "de-primary schoolization" into the local government's education supervision and evaluation index system, with a weight of over 30%, and directly link the evaluation results to the allocation of special preschool education funds and the qualification for awards and honors. For regions that perform outstandingly in the governance of primary schoolization, the department will grant them priority in applying for provincial preschool education reform projects, forming a policy orientation of "positive incentives - healthy competition".

4.2 Deepen curriculum and teaching reforms, and return to the essence of education

Innovating the curriculum implementation model is the core approach to solving the problem of primary schoolization. The curriculum should strictly follow the requirements of the "Guidelines for the Learning and Development of Children Aged 3-6", and reconstruct a curriculum system with games as the basic activity: ensure at least 3 hours of continuous independent game time each day, and create open environments such as "exploration and discovery areas", "role-playing areas", and "construction game areas" based on the age characteristics of children, providing low-structured and multi-functional game materials. Kindergarten will develop a theme-based curriculum resource library based on life scenarios, integrating contents from the five domains of health, language, society, science, and art around life-themed topics such as "my community", "seasonal changes", and "the growth of animals and plants", and promote the overall construction of children's experiences through project-based learning. What else, it will establish a quality tracking mechanism for curriculum implementation, and regularly conduct evaluations of children's development to ensure the appropriateness and balance of the curriculum content.

Strengthening the construction of a professional support system for teachers is the key guarantee for the implementation of reforms. The support system will implement the kindergarten teacher professional ability improvement project, focusing on training core abilities such as game observation and guidance, learning story recording, and environment creation, and establish a compulsory credit system of 360 hours every five years. The system should innovate the paired assistance mechanism, promoting the radiation of high-quality educational resources to rural areas and weak kindergartens through forms such as on-the-job training, joint research and teaching, and online sharing. It should also raise the entry threshold for kindergarten teachers, increasing the weight of the "Guidelines for the Learning and Development of Children Aged 3-6" in the teacher qualification examination, and making child development psychology a mandatory assessment subject, enhancing teachers' professional qualities from the source.

Equally important is the empowerment of teachers as curriculum decision-makers. Often, teachers are caught between policy mandates and parental expectations, with little space for professional judgment. By involving educators in curriculum design and encouraging reflective practice through professional learning communities, kindergartens can foster a culture of innovation and child-sensitive pedagogy. This not only enhances the quality of instruction but also restores teachers' agency in resisting the pressure of schoolification.

4.3 Build a collaborative education mechanism and reshape the co-education ecosystem of home, school, and society

Innovating the form of home-school co-education is an important way to change parents' concepts. The form of home-school co-education can implement the three-year action plan for parent education, develop a series of resources such as the "Scientific Parenting Guidance Manual", and help parents establish correct educational concepts through content such as case analysis, interpretation of children's

development laws, and design of family game activities. It can establish a "Parent Experience Day" system, inviting parents to deeply participate in half-day activities of the kindergarten every month. Through observing children's learning process in games and participating in special topic discussions, parents can personally experience the educational value of game-based teaching. It can build a "dual-channel" mechanism for home-kindergarten communication to form educational consensus.

Reforming the educational evaluation method is the guiding stick for the shift in practice. The educational evaluation can establish an electronic growth record system for children, presenting their learning trajectory and development characteristics in games through various carriers such as text records, activity photos, and video clips. It can develop a regional assessment toolkit for children's development, including observation record forms, work analysis guidelines, and situational assessment plans, guiding teachers to evaluate children's development from multiple dimensions such as physical actions, social emotions, language expression, and cognitive exploration. Strictly, it can enforce the "zero testing" rule: prohibit organizing children to take knowledge tests in any form, such as word recognition and arithmetic ability, and do not use quantitative indicators as the basis for evaluating children's development. Truly, it will reverse the evaluation orientation that "emphasizes results over processes".

4.4 Optimize the mechanism for the transition from kindergarten to primary school and build a smooth transition system

Improving the education for school readiness is the fundamental project to solve the transition dilemma. Improving ways should implement the "gradual school adaptation" reform. In the primary school stage, the system will set a 4-6 week adaptation period in the first grade, and help children gradually adapt to the primary school learning rhythm through transitional arrangements such as "flexible class hours", "game-based teaching", and "life-oriented activities". In terms of resource support, it will develop a kindergarten-primary school transition activity resource package, covering four modules: physical and mental adaptation, life adaptation, social adaptation, and learning adaptation. For physical and mental adaptation, emotional management games can be used; for life adaptation, children can be encouraged to organize their own belongings; for social adaptation, peer interaction skills can be included; and for learning adaptation, task awareness can be emphasized. It can provide specific activity plans and operation guidelines. In the kindergarten stage, teachers focus on cultivating children's task awareness, rule awareness, and independent living skills in the second semester of the senior class. Through role-playing games such as "duty student" and "class manager", naturally incorporate elements of school readiness, replacing mechanical knowledge indoctrination. Establishing a collaborative research and teaching system is a key measure to achieve seamless transition. It can form a cross-stage research and teaching community, led by the county-level research and teaching department, organizing kindergarten and primary school teachers to jointly conduct research on key issues such as "continuity of children's development", "teaching method transition", and "learning environment transition". The system will also develop transition course resources, designing a series of transition activities around key areas such as language expression and mathematical cognition to achieve organic connection of educational content. It will establish a two-way job exchange mechanism between kindergarten and primary school teachers, arranging a certain proportion of teachers to learn on the job in the corresponding stage each year, promoting the integration and innovation of educational concepts and practical methods.

4.5 Create a favorable social environment and build consensus on scientific parenting

Regulating the off-campus training market is an important step to purify the educational ecosystem. The education department should strictly enforce the ban on subject-based training in the preschool education stage. The market supervision department and the education administrative department jointly carry out special rectification actions, and legally shut down institutions that offer training in subjects such as phonetics, arithmetic, and character recognition for preschool children. It can establish a "black and white list" system for training institutions, regularly publishing the list of compliant and non-compliant institutions through official channels to guide parents to make rational choices. Strengthen the supervision of children's education apps. The cyberspace administration department and the education department jointly establish a content review mechanism, strictly prohibiting the development of applications containing primary school content, and cutting off the negative impact of commercial capital on the preschool education ecosystem.

Strengthening public opinion guidance and publicity is the fundamental project to change social

cognition. The education department should carry out the "scientific parenting in the community" theme publicity campaign, organizing preschool education experts and child psychologists to give public welfare lectures in the community, interpreting the spirit of the "Guidelines for Children's Learning and Development from 3 to 6 Years Old", and popularizing the laws of children's physical and mental development. A series of popular science promotional products will be produced, using easy-to-understand forms such as animated short films, graphic illustrations, and case stories, and widely disseminated through TV stations, short video platforms, community bulletin boards, and other channels. A column on "Children's Game Cases" will be set up in mainstream media, with high-quality game activity cases and expert comments pushed out every week, demonstrating the role of games in promoting children's imagination, creativity, and social skills, and creating a social atmosphere of "respecting children's nature and protecting their happy childhood".

5. Conclusion

The trend of preschool education becoming overly academic is a complex educational issue resulting from the combined effects of social structural anxiety, market-driven operations, and weak policy enforcement. Its governance requires systematic thinking and collaborative actions. By establishing a "five-in-one" governance framework of "policy supervision - curriculum reform - home-school collaboration - kindergarten-primary school transition - social ecology", a joint force can be formed to curb the trend of preschool education becoming overly academic. Adhering to the educational stance of "child-centeredness", respecting the physical and mental development laws and learning characteristics of children aged 3-6, and safeguarding children's rights to play and explore, can truly return preschool education to its essence of nurturing people, laying a solid foundation for children's lifelong learning and development.

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