



Comparison of Preschool Education between China and the United States

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Abstract. With the increasing demand for innovative talents in the global talent market, the impact of preschool education on children's learning ability and exploratory spirit is increasingly receiving attention. Since the 21st century, Chinese educators have made adjustments and improvements to preschool education, but there are still problems and limitations. Therefore, this study explores the differences in preschool education between China and the United States by collecting literature on preschool education in both country, and comparing it from multiple perspectives. The aim of this study is to point out the advantages of American preschool education and propose solutions for the improvement of Chinese preschool education. The research has found that China's preschool education has already recognized the advantages of using natural education method in preschool education, but there are problems and difficulties in practical application. Therefore, compared to simply change the preschool education, China needs to further change its education mechanism in the future to better cultivate students' personal and learning abilities.

Keywords: Contrastive Study, Preschool Education, Natural Education, China, The United States.

1 Introduction

Recent years, in the context of changes in the global talent market, Chinese education has begun to focus on cultivating students' learning ability and exploratory spirit. Many educational reform measures have been used to optimize the education system to help students cultivate the ability of exploration and innovation. Being in the early stages of children's learning and physical development, preschool education is considered having a significant impact on cultivating students' learning ability and exploratory spirit.

Influenced by history and culture background, the West countries have completely different educational methods and systems from China. The naturalistic educational ideas and methods used in preschool education have the characteristics of liveliness, generative, and exploratory nature, and are believed to promote the integrated development of children's cognition, skills, emotions, attitudes, etc. ^[1]. It can help accumulate learning experience and stimulate children's learning instincts ^[2]. Ultimately, learning ability and exploratory spirit can be better formed. Due to the lack of innovation and

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exploration among Chinese students, this research suggests that learning from Western natural education in kindergartens can help improve the teaching methods and the quality of preschool education in China. This research aims to help children develop own potential, personality, and learning abilities that are beneficial for future development. It also can strengthen the innovation and exploration abilities of Chinese children by improving their education during the enlightenment stage.

In previous studies, many have separately studied the current situation and characteristics of kindergartens natural education in China and the West, and have been committed to identifying problems and providing solutions for preschool education in China. However, despite a large amount of research proposing improvement suggestions for preschool education in China and the government starting to pay attention to nature education, the implementation of kindergartens nature education still faces many problems in China. The issues include limitations in the scope of implementation, limitations in the methods of implementation, and inadequate teaching effectiveness. How to integrate nature education with China's preschool education still has research space and research value.

In this study, the author conducted a specific comparison and analysis of preschool education between China and USA. The specific content includes: comparison of Chinese and American preschool education, analysis of existing problems in preschool education in China, analysis of the causes of problems in preschool education in China and measures for improving preschool education in China. The aim of this study is to identify the existing problems in preschool education in China and find the reasons for failing to apply natural education. It is hoped to help Chinese preschool education implement natural education methods, provide higher quality and personalized education for Chinese children, strengthen Chinese children's learning experience and instincts and cultivate Chinese children's innovation and exploration abilities.

2 Comparison of Chinese and American Preschool Education

2.1 Differences in Educational Concepts

In the United States, educational ideology of preschool education has been largely influenced by Western naturalistic educational thoughts. In ancient Greece, the philosopher Aristotle has emphasized the importance of the natural instincts of children. Later, with the rise of humanism, Rousseau proposed naturalistic educational thoughts in the 18th century, emphasizing the stimulation and cultivation of children's learning interests and experiences through non book and school education^[3]. These educational concepts that emphasize the important of naturalistic education and children's learning instinct have led to two important theories in the 20th century, including Piaget's cognitive-developmental theory and John Dewey's pragmatic theory. Dewey emphasizes the importance of experiential learning in children's education^[4]. Piaget's theory also explains that children will enter the Preoperational stage at the age of 2-7. During this stage of learning, children will internalize natural representations and greatly promote their intellectual. Both theories emphasize that natural have a significant impact on children's cognitive and intellectual development during preschool. These two theories

have greatly influenced Western educational models nowadays. Europe and the United States have gradually formed today's preschool education models since the 20th century, such as outdoor education and forest kindergartens, which are manifestations of emphasizing nature education and stimulating children's learning instincts^[5].

In China, the concepts and models of education are more influenced by traditional habits. In history, China has long used teacher-based learning methods such as Sishu in ancient times. Also, with the pressure of entrance exams for Chinese children, Chinese education focuses more on knowledge itself, emphasizing the efficiency and quality of learning, and lacks the attention to children's natural and self-development. On the other hand, influenced by Confucius' ideology of etiquette, preschool education in China tends to cultivate children's good behavior habits to meet social standards, but this also limits children's exploration of the natural world and self-cognition to a certain extent.

2.2 Differences in Teaching Methods and Teaching Content

Due to the influence of educational concepts and the historical background, preschool education in China and the United States today also has differences in teaching methods and content.

In the United States, preschool education is conducted with children as the leading role. Several studies have shown that kindergartens in United States emphasize the "teacher-student interaction" teaching method and many kindergartens have adopted the "guided game" teaching method^[6,7]. This teaching method is between teaching which fully dependent on the teacher and free play which fully dependent on the child. Through teacher guidance and purposeful game settings, "guided game" provides children chance to learn actively and explore the world through games. This teaching method can stimulate children's thinking, behavior, and communicative abilities^[8]. At the same time, preschool education in the United States also focuses on outdoor courses. Unlike simply playing games, outdoor classes place the lesson in nature and it encourages children to learn through exploration and experience. In terms of teaching content, American preschool education also has the characteristics of diverse. Research shows that in addition to normal basic subjects, American preschool education also places great emphasis on language skills, social skills, cognitive development, and mental health^[9].

Compared to the United States, in China, the main teaching activities are placed indoors, and are mostly conducted by teachers. Teachers will give children specific lectures and tasks. Outdoor activities are just games that have no teaching purpose. Although this teaching method can also enable children to learn knowledge or improve personal abilities in the process of completing tasks, it lacks the process of children's autonomous exploration of the world and acquiring knowledge and growth from experiences. In terms of teaching content, due to the more serious pressure on Chinese children to rise from kindergarten to primary school, the teaching content of Chinese kindergartens is more targeted and limited than that of the United States. At present, China's preschool education has a characteristic of being like primary school, which means that children need to study a part of primary school knowledge early in kindergarten.

This limits the development of non-intellectual abilities of Chinese children, including self-cognitive ability, autonomous learning ability, and communicative ability^[10].

2.3 Differences in Educational Purposes

The purpose of education is to provide society with more high-quality labor. Therefore, in the long run, the purpose of preschool education in both China and the United States is to lay the foundation for secondary education and higher education, and promote the future development and overall development of young children. However, due to different national conditions, there are differences in the implementation of this overall goal.

In terms of long-term goals, the American Association of Early Childhood Education explicitly stated in 2005 that preschool education should cultivate children's artistic, cognitive, emotional, linguistic, physical, and social abilities^[11]. In terms of short-term goals, the K-12 education system in the United States also stipulates curriculum objectives and teaching content for preschool education^[11]. This makes preschool education in the United States have clear teaching content and objectives. So, on this basis, preschool students can be fully given the opportunity to develop themselves, explore the world, and learn freely, so as to maximize their learning abilities and learning interests.

Compared to the United States, the educational goals of China's preschool education also emphasize the cultivation of personalized and innovative talents in terms of long-term goals, and it also puts forward the requirements for the comprehensiveness and sustainability of children's learning. Since the 20th century, China has continuously improved preschool education, giving it more autonomy rather than unified teaching contents^[12]. But for China, the pressure of entering a primary school can't be ignored. Although China's preschool education has recognized that children should be given more freedom to engage with society and nature to stimulate their learning abilities and learning interests, teachers have to increase the teaching time and content of basic subjects to ensure children's competitiveness. In fact, sending children to a high-quality primary school is the most primary goal and urgent need of today's kindergartens and parents.

3 Analysis of Existing Problems in Preschool Education in China

3.1 Lack of Natural Education

Influenced by educational concepts, China's preschool education lacks emphasis on natural education and also lacks the effectiveness. There is less time for outdoor activities in preschool education in China. A 2018 study in China showed that in preschool education, unified study activities accounted for about 40%, more than 20% of autonomous game activities, 30% of life activities, and 10% of sports activities^[13]. It shows that unified study is still the main teaching method of preschool education in China, while outdoor learning and autonomous learning are relatively rare. In addition, the

study also showed that nearly half of parents and teachers believe that learning activities are the most beneficial parts in education and should account for the largest proportion of times^[13]. It also shows that China's preschool education pays more attention to study knowledge and ignores natural education and children's autonomous exploration.

3.2 Limitation in Teaching Methods and Teaching Contents

Firstly, China's preschool education is facing a serious trend towards primary education. The current preschool education pays too much attention to core curriculum knowledge such as Chinese, mathematics, and English, adding too much knowledge that exceeds the intellectual and physical levels of young children^[14,15]. This teaching method and content limits children's time for outdoor activities, autonomous learning, and autonomous exploration. It also violates the laws of children's intellectual and physical development. In addition, it may also bring enormous academic pressure to children, causing them to question their own learning abilities, reducing their thirst for knowledge and exploration, discouraging their autonomy and enthusiasm for learning, and even leading to psychological diseases such as inferiority complex, weariness of learning, and reversal mind^[15]. On the other hand, even if some kindergartens begin to focus on natural practice education courses, their curriculum content is still focus on unified social practice activities rather than autonomous learning^[16]. The frequency of social practice courses is often once a week or once a month, making natural education difficult to become the main teaching method for Chinese preschool education^[16]. China's kindergarten education still lacks autonomous exploration and experience learning. Nature education is difficult to bring significant benefits to children.

3.3 Lack of Aiming at Long-term Benefits

Although the early learning of primary school curriculum and knowledge can give children an advantage in the short term, such as being able to enter a better primary school or achieve higher scores in exams, the impact on long-term learning outcomes is controversial. As analyzed in the previous paragraph, during the initial development and improvement stage of children's sensory and physical organs, excessive intellectual education and excessively difficult knowledge can have a negative impact on children's long-term development^[15]. This can lead to a lack of the ability to think independently, judge independently, explore actively, and innovate academically. In terms of social abilities, children will also have disadvantages due to the lack of experience. Therefore, it has to be acknowledged that China pays too much attention to short-term benefits in preschool education and lacks the consideration for long-term development of children.

4 Analysis of the Causes of Problems in Preschool Education in China

In fact, Chinese educators have realized the importance of natural education. In history, scholar Xingzhi Tao emphasized the importance of practice in education. His

educational thought clarified the relationship between learning and life. It believes that education should be combined with life, society, and practice. Since the 21st century, China has also undertaken educational reforms aimed at stimulating the potential and personality of children to cultivate more innovative talents. But why are there still many problems in preschool education? Why is it difficult to apply nature education in China?

4.1 Uneven Economic Situation

Compared to traditional unified teaching method, nature education needs more financial support. Kindergartens need to provide more safe, various, and educational activity scenes and spaces. Children need more different natural scenes to learn. These all require more capital assistance and higher tuition fees. Therefore, even if natural education methods are considered to have better educational quality, only a few private kindergartens in China can afford such personalized education. Most public kindergartens can only provide unified management and teaching.

4.2 Lack of Educational Talents

Compared to traditional unified teaching, nature education is more difficult. Teachers need to create a suitable autonomous learning environment or formulate targeted autonomous learning activities to ensure the education quality. At the same time, teachers need to pay comprehensive attention to each student, explore children's potential and talents, and provide appropriate guidance. This requires experienced teachers with a high-level educational background. However, compared to European and American countries, China does not have the tradition and historical background of natural education, and there is a lack of high-quality education talents for natural education. This lack will seriously affect the implementation and the effectiveness of natural education. If the role of natural education cannot be maximized, the educational quality may not even be as good as traditional unified teaching. Children will lose both knowledge and personal abilities.

4.3 High Pressure of Education Competition

Due to the lack of educational resources and inequality caused by uneven regional development and a large population base, China's competitive pressures in education are more than most of the European and American countries. The K-12 education system in the United States can well ensure the enrollment rate and quality of education for children. But in China, whether children can enter a high-quality primary school is an urgent problem that parents worry about. Therefore, although nature education at the kindergarten stage can benefit for children's development and personal ability in a long term, it is still a bad situation if children fail in entering a good primary school due to a lack of knowledge. Six years of primary school study has a significant impact on children's learning and growth. High quality primary schools can provide children with more educational resources and more possibilities to enter high-quality junior high schools and high-quality high schools. On the contrary, if primary schools can't provide

children with an ideal education, natural education in the preschool will also be of no avail. Therefore, under great competitive pressure, China's preschool education needs a more efficient learning method. That is the reason why natural education is difficult to gain widespread recognition and application in China's preschool education.

5 Measures for Improving Preschool Education in China

Based on the analysis of the existing problems and factors that leading to these problems in China's preschool education, this part proposes some suggestion for improving China's preschool education. The measures aim to find ways to better integrate nature education with Chinese preschool education and promote the growth and personalized development of Chinese children. Ultimately, it is hoped to cultivate personalized and innovative talents.

5.1 Change the Purpose of Education

If China's preschool education is hoped to receive and apply natural education, the society should change the view and the understanding of educational purposes. Instead of short-term goals and benefits such as entering a high-quality primary school, parents and educators should focus on cultivating children's qualities which can benefit future development, rather than focusing on specific knowledge. Firstly, the government should publicize the teaching method and the benefits of nature education, so that society can understand and accept nature education. Secondly, the government should also provide financial and technical support to encourage more kindergartens to start experimenting with nature education.

5.2 Improve the Education System

One of the premises for kindergartens to start trying nature education is that the pressure for further education can be minimized. Parents and educators are willing to implement natural education only when there is no concern about their children entering low-quality primary schools. Firstly, the government should change the assessment methods for primary school entrance examination. Instead of knowledge, primary schools should be required to focus more on children's personalities, potential, and learning abilities. Secondly, the government should optimize preschool education and the education system: the government should merge preschool education and primary education and cancel the entrance examination at this stage. This can ensure the continuity in basic education and maximize the development of children's knowledge, personality, and study skills.

5.3 Cultivating High-quality Teachers

Another prerequisite for kindergartens to start experimenting with nature education is the availability of high-quality teachers who can provide such education. In China, preschool education is not be considered as a good department in universities, and

preschool teaching is not considered as a good job. More high-quality teachers are committed to teaching in high school or university while neglecting preschool education. In order to address the shortage of preschool teachers and improve the quality of preschool education, the government should take action to encourage talents to enter the field of preschool education. Firstly, the government should strengthen the preschool education major in universities, provide more and higher quality education resources, and provide training in nature education to enable future teachers to have the knowledge background and professional skills of nature education. Secondly, the government should increase publicity to improve the social welfare and the social recognition of preschool teachers which can help to encourage high-quality teachers and talents to enter kindergartens and work towards cultivating the next generation of outstanding talents.

6 Conclusion

The research has shown that there are still problems with educational concepts, teaching methods, and educational objectives in preschool education in China. The reasons why China has failed to apply natural education include: financial constraints caused by uneven regional economic development, technological limitations caused by the lack of educational talents, and social limitations caused by high competition pressure in education. It showed that the Chinese government should start paying attention to these existing problems and making improvements on these key factors.

This study analyzed the problems and difficulties in implementing nature education in kindergartens. It can help teachers, researchers, and governments realize the key factor of implementing nature education is not on the form but the effectiveness. It encourages educators to rethink and investigate the current practical application of nature education in kindergartens and to make adjustments and provide improvements. At the same time, the study summed up few previous studies and also clarifies the importance and significance of natural education in kindergartens, which can provide directions for future researchers. The main contribution of this article is to help improve preschool education in China and to help Chinese children strengthen their learning experience and instincts and cultivate their innovation and exploration abilities.

However, this study still has limitations. Firstly, based on literature research method of this study, there are still limitations in identifying issues and providing improving measures. Secondly, focusing on theory, the suggestions provided in the research are based on reasoning for discovering problems, which is relatively idealized and still has limitations in practical implementation. Future research should focus on more practice.

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