

The Current Status and Improvement Strategies for Preschool Education in Ethnic Minority Areas in Southwest China—Taking City A as an Example

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Keywords: Ethnic Minority Areas, Pre-School Education, Countermeasures Exploration

Abstract: In the 21st century, preschool education is becoming an important part of the lifelong education process. At present, although China's preschool education has a certain development, but there are still many shortcomings, especially as a multi-ethnic country, the preschool education of ethnic minority ethnic areas is still in a state of urgent need of development. This paper investigates the case of A city in an ethnic area in southwest China, and finds that early childhood education in ethnic minority areas presents a series of problems such as the lack of teachers with low quality, the lack of citizens' attention to preschool education, and the passive position of young children in education, etc. It proposes to strengthen the construction of early childhood teachers, the government to strengthen the investment in education, and to transform the concepts of parents to change the way of education in order to find a way out of the development of preschool education in the ethnic minority areas in southwest China. It is proposed to strengthen the construction of early childhood teachers, the government's investment in education, change parents' concepts, and change the way of education, so as to seek a way out for the development of preschool education in the southwest minority areas.

1. Introduction

Pre-school education is the basic education for the lifelong development of young children, and national education provides support for the stable development of education in the entire country. With the promulgation of the Pre-school Education Law, the development of pre-school education in China has shown a trend towards standardization. With the in-depth promotion of the national strategies of "rural revitalization" and "education equity", the development of education in ethnic minority areas has received increasing attention. As the "starting point" of the education system, the quality of preschool education has a direct impact on the formation of children's subsequent learning ability and comprehensive quality. Southwest China is an important region inhabited by ethnic minorities, and the development of preschool education is relatively lagging behind due to the constraints of history, geography and economy. Taking City A as an example, this paper analyzes the current situation of its preschool education and explores the development path that conforms to the reality of ethnic areas, which is of great practical significance.

2. Current situation and problems of pre-school education in city A

Kindergartens in City A show an unequal number of public kindergartens and private kindergartens, as of 2024, there are about 43 public kindergartens, which is still small in number, and about 146 private kindergartens, which is far more than the number of public kindergartens; and it shows that public kindergartens are difficult to enter, and private kindergartens charge a high fee, among which there are no minority kindergartens in urban areas; and there are no minority kindergartens in urban areas, and the minority kindergartens are distributed^[1]. From the viewpoint of the teacher strength of kindergarten teachers, public kindergartens have relatively excellent teachers, more teachers with long teaching experience, and high employment threshold, high requirements for hiring, and high competition; private kindergartens have low employment thresholds, and the age of pre-school teachers is on the low side as a whole, and the professional quality of teachers is also uneven. The municipal government has implemented the "one village, one kindergarten" program, vigorously supplementing the shortcomings of preschool education; under the implementation of the "one village, one kindergarten" and "one township, one kindergarten" policies, the gross enrollment rate of preschool education has reached 89%, and the gross enrollment rate of preschool education has increased to 90%. With the implementation of policies such as "one village, one child" and "one village, one kindergarten", the gross enrollment rate of preschool education has reached 89%. In 2018, the government organized the National Early Childhood Teacher Training College to vigorously train kindergarten teachers, but in fact, there is still much room for updating the educational concepts and methods of kindergarten teachers, and the staffing of kindergarten teachers is still not scientific enough.

2.1. Insufficient professional competence of teachers and lack of pre-service training

The academic qualifications of early childhood teachers are generally low, with fewer having postgraduate qualifications or above, and the specialties they study are uneven, and there is a lack of professional training, with about 65 per cent of teachers not having received systematic training in ethno-educational methods, and some pre-school teachers entering the early childhood education profession directly without taking part in the professional training for the pre-school education post^[2]. Teachers with specialised degrees have strong practical skills, but insufficient theoretical knowledge. They are not innovative enough when it comes to preparing lesson plans and struggle to solve certain educational scenarios in a professional and advanced way. They may also be deficient in terms of self-education and self-monitoring. Teachers with a bachelor's degree are rich in theoretical knowledge, but lacking in skills, and may not be able to communicate well with parents and children in practice.

2.2. Low teacher salaries and irrational teacher structure

Pre-school education in ethnic areas is relatively backward compared to developed coastal cities, and the salary of early childhood teachers is generally around 2,000 yuan. The number of kindergartens cannot satisfy the children attending them, and many kindergartens have large class sizes, yet the number of teachers per class is limited. In the face of high-pressure work and lower salaries, fewer and fewer people are willing to engage in the early childhood education industry, resulting in an unstable teaching workforce and the continuous loss of talent. This, in turn, affects the number of teachers, creating a vicious circle. Low teacher salaries and a lack of material resources to encourage teachers to do their best will also affect the quality of education. On the one hand, the age structure of the preschool teachers is unreasonable, there are more veteran teachers with longer teaching experience and fewer young teachers in public schools, which lack vitality and

new educational concepts; while in private schools, the teachers are younger and there is a lack of veteran teachers with rich educational experience. On the other hand, the ratio of men to women in the pre-school teaching force is not reasonable, with fewer male teachers and more women working in the field of early childhood education.

2.3. Parents' educational concepts are backward, and society does not attach enough importance to pre-school education

In ethnic minority areas, under the constraints of the natural environment, the education conditions were backward in the past, and the society, the older generation had little education, the stereotype of treating kindergartens as children's nurseries and kindergarten teachers as babysitters is still present in the minds of the majority of parents, who don't regard pre-school education as a foundation of their children's lifelong development, and they don't see that it is an indispensable part of the children's growth and life. Only 25% of parents recognize the importance of preschool education for their children in ethnic areas, which shows the problem of low awareness of preschool education among parents of students in ethnic areas^[3]. There are differences in the attitudes of parents of different socio-economic statuses towards kindergarten education, i.e., there are differences in the demand for kindergarten education among parents of different occupations and income levels. On the whole, parents of clerical and related education personnel attached higher importance to all aspects of kindergarten education^[4]. The social status of early childhood teachers is not high, their work is not recognized, home and family cooperation is not carried out satisfactorily and smoothly, and society as a whole does not attach enough importance to preschool education.

2.4. Insufficient government investment and lack of integration of national cultures

It is difficult to enter public kindergartens, and private kindergartens charge high tuition fees. Then, number of public kindergartens in City A is small, and private kindergartens are numerous. Generally, parents give priority to public kindergartens when choosing a kindergarten. However, due to the limited number of public kindergartens and the large number of preschool-age children, it is very difficult to get into a public kindergarten, which compels parents to consider a private kindergarten. Although private kindergartens have better-equipped parks, high tuition fees add to the financial burden of education. Kindergartens in rural areas are much simpler than those in urban areas in terms of construction, both in terms of resource allocation and safety, and private kindergartens in rural areas are not standardized, and there are often family-type kindergartens, which are operated as lunch care institutions. The cultural integration of kindergartens is superficial, and in essence, the local culture is not developed. Ethnic culture should be one of the characteristics of kindergartens in ethnic areas, however, these characteristics are mostly found in the environmental creation of the kindergarten, and in the educational and teaching activities, the teachers do not do a good job of using and spreading the local ethnic culture, and in the development of curricula, there are few lesson plans about the characteristics of the local culture. The number of children in each class is on the high side. Too many children in a class not only increases the pressure on teachers, but also hinders the development of educational activities, as teachers spend more time and energy on child care, which can hinder the improvement of the quality of education.

3. The way forward for preschool education in the ethnic areas of the south-west of China

In response to the current issues in preschool education in southwestern ethnic minority regions,

such as insufficient professional competence and poor treatment of teachers, high teacher turnover, inadequate government policies and financial investment, and insufficient integration of ethnic culture, countermeasures can be explored from three major aspects: teachers, government, and cultural integration.

3.1. Strengthening the early childhood teaching force and promoting the professionalization of preschool teachers

If preschool education in ethnic areas is to be substantially improved, the first and most important thing is to develop preschool teachers and reorganize the teaching force. On the one hand, it is possible to implement the "Orientation Training Program for Kindergarten Teachers in Ethnic Areas" to enhance the supply of localized teachers and improve the structure of teachers' qualifications. Uniform standards should be adopted for teacher recruitment and the entry threshold for kindergarten teachers should be strictly controlled^[5]. Increase the proportion of male kindergarten teachers to achieve gender balance in the profession. On the other hand, it is necessary to promote the professionalization of preschool teachers. Preschool teachers in ethnic areas are more inclined to practice, and there are shortcomings in theory. It is possible to set up a provincial-municipal-county training network to carry out training on topics such as "bilingual teaching" and "integration of ethnic cultures"; before teachers are hired, they should be examined to see if they have had any professional training for employment, and after they take up their jobs, their training should be based on both theory and practice, so that they can develop in a comprehensive way. This enables teachers to develop in a holistic manner.

3.2. Optimizing the construction of parks and strengthening the integration of national cultures

Kindergarten entry and exit security systems should be further improved to ensure children's personal safety. Public kindergartens can expand the area of their parks to provide more extensive activity space for children; private kindergartens should strengthen the construction of their teachers, so as not to let the construction of kindergartens become a superficial form. Secondly, national culture education should be strengthened, and attempts should be made to combine the local culture with the mainstream culture, so that the environment, classroom decoration and activity areas should be full of multicultural characteristics. At the same time, we can develop localized curriculum resources such as "bilingual picture books", "folk songs and dances", "handicrafts", etc., and implement "gamification" and "living" programs " and "life-oriented" teaching modes, establishing bases for the inheritance of ethnic cultures, and inviting non-hereditary inheritors into the schools.

3.3. The Government should increase its investment in pre-school education

As a supporter of education, the government must first address the issue of preschool teachers' salaries and benefits, such as increasing financial investment in preschool education, standardizing kindergarten tuition fees, improving teacher benefits, establishing clear career advancement pathways. Secondly, the government should strengthen the construction of "one kindergarten per village" initiatives to ensure that children of appropriate age have access to kindergarten education, improve kindergarten facilities such as buildings, playgrounds, and educational materials, and strive to create better living and growth conditions for young children^[6]. Finally, the government should implement supportive policies for preschool education. For example, the government can purchase preschool education services, including preschool assessment services and preschool infrastructure

services, establish a “Special Fund for Preschool Education in Ethnic Minority Areas” to prioritize the construction of rural kindergartens^[7].

4. Conclusions

The development of preschool education in minority areas in Southwest China is not only related to educational equity, but also to the long-term situation of national unity and cultural inheritance, and the practice of City A has shown that only through the multi-dimensional efforts of government-led, social participation, cultural integration, and teacher enhancement can we break through the bottlenecks of development, and walk out of the road of revitalization of preschool education in line with the characteristics of minority areas. In the future, it is necessary to further strengthen the implementation of policies and innovative practices, so that every ethnic minority child can enjoy fair and quality pre-school education and lay a solid foundation for their lifelong development.

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