

A study on the understanding and implementation difficulties of kindergarten teachers in the policy of “deprimaryization”

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Abstract:

With the development of kindergarten education, the policy of “de-primary schooling” has played an increasingly important role in China’s preschool education system. In the past, public understanding of this policy mainly stayed at the textual level, neglecting teachers’ subjective cognition and practical dilemmas in implementation. This has led to several problems, including the persistence of primary-school-oriented teaching practices, the mismatch between parental expectations and policy objectives, and the unequal distribution of educational resources. These issues not only weaken the effective implementation of the policy, but also intensify educational involution, resource imbalance, and developmentally inappropriate practices for children. Therefore, this study intends to adopt literature review, questionnaire survey, and case analysis methods to explore teachers’ understanding of the “de-primary schooling” policy, the difficulties they encounter in the implementation process, and their behavioral manifestations. Based on the findings, this paper proposes solutions such as strengthening teacher training, optimizing home-kindergarten co-education concepts, improving policy support systems, and perfecting supervision mechanisms, with the aim of promoting the effective implementation of the policy and advancing the healthy development of preschool education. This study focuses on teachers’ understanding, challenges, and behavioral responses regarding the “de-primary schooling” policy, as well as suggestions for policy improvement.

Keywords: de-primary schooling, kindergarten teachers, policy implementation dilemma, preschool education development

1. Research Background

In recent years, with the rise of “competitive parenting” and the intensification of “educational involution,” the phenomenon of primary-school-oriented practices has become increasingly prevalent in kindergartens. In response, the Ministry of Education has issued a series of policy documents, including the *Notice on Regulating Kindergarten Care and Education Work and Preventing and Correcting the Phenomenon of Primary Schooling* (2011, 2012)^[1] and the *Preschool Education Law of the People’s Republic of China*^[2] adopted by the Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress in November 2024. These regulations emphasize the importance of children’s physical and psychological development, highlighting play and everyday life as the foundation of early education. However, reality shows a different picture. Compared with public kindergartens, private institutions are often more problematic, with some still teaching pinyin or arithmetic instead of basic number sense. For teachers, understanding and faithfully implementing the policy is crucial^[3]. Addressing this issue requires joint efforts from multiple parties, making it a widely discussed topic in the field of contemporary preschool education.

2. Literature Review

Since 2010, China has issued numerous policies such as the *Guidelines for Learning and Development of Children Aged 3–6* (2012) and the *Kindergarten Work Regulations* (2016 revision), advocating play as the fundamental activity in preschool^[2]. Studies have shown that primary-schooling manifests in curriculum content, teaching methods, and assessment practices—for example, teaching pinyin and arithmetic, adopting lecture-style instruction, and using paper-and-pencil tests^[4]. Researchers have attributed these issues to multiple factors. Lu Chang pointed out that insufficient educational supervision, profit-driven motives of private kindergartens, and uneven teacher professionalism are key contributors^[5].

During policy implementation, problems such as inadequate teacher professional development, parental misconceptions, and children’s adaptability hinder effective execution^[6]. In contrast, Western countries emphasize developmentally appropriate practices and respect for children’s natural growth. Piaget’s cognitive development theory encouraged children to explore and construct knowledge actively, emphasizing that preschoolers in the preoperational stage rely on intuition and symbolic thinking and should learn through play^[7]. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) in the United States also stressed respect for age character-

istics, individual differences, and sociocultural contexts, advocating against premature academic teaching^[8]. Similarly, European countries and Japan emphasize children’s natural development within their environments, where primary-schooling is rarely seen^[9].

Overall, domestic and international studies on primary-schooling focus on four areas:

1. Policy interpretation and the conceptual connotation of “de-primary schooling”
2. Manifestations and cases of primary-schooling (e.g., early academic teaching, subject-oriented pedagogy)
3. Social, familial, and institutional causes of the phenomenon
4. The influence of teachers’ beliefs and professional competence

However, research on policy implementation from teachers’ perspectives remains limited. Few studies systematically analyze teachers’ cognitive understanding, behavioral adjustments, and practical dilemmas in executing the policy. Most existing studies adopt quantitative methods such as questionnaires, lacking in-depth qualitative approaches like interviews or classroom observations^[10]. Thus, studying teachers’ perspectives on the “de-primary schooling” policy can reveal key barriers to implementation, enrich research on micro-level policy execution mechanisms, and provide theoretical and practical guidance for preschool education.

3. Research Significance

Theoretical significance

This study enriches the understanding of the “de-primary schooling” policy by highlighting gaps from teachers’ perspectives and promoting the transformation of policies from “paper guidance” to “practical implementation.”^[11] It helps bridge the gap between teaching beliefs and practices, offering theoretical references for future research. By addressing the lack of teacher-based perspectives and grassroots data, it contributes both scholarly value and practical influence.^[12]

Practical significance

By identifying teachers’ dilemmas in implementation, this research provides evidence for policymakers to improve policy design and application. It highlights practical challenges such as uneven teacher resources and divergent parental expectations, offering suggestions for targeted teacher training^[13]. Moreover, it supports the return to child-centered preschool education, reducing “early academic training” and promoting equitable distribution of educational resources^[14].

4. Research Methods

4.1 Literature Review

The study systematically reviews domestic research on the connotation and practice of “de-primary schooling,” employing analytical frameworks to clarify core issues and identify shortcomings. This serves as the theoretical foundation for the research.

4.2 Questionnaire Survey

A survey was conducted among 200 teachers from urban and rural kindergartens. Of the participants, 150 were from urban kindergartens (75%) and 50 from rural kindergartens (25%). In terms of gender, 5 were male (2.5%) and 195 female (97.5%). Age distribution: 60 teachers (30%) were aged 25 and below, 85 teachers (42.5%) aged 26–35, and 55 teachers (27.5%) aged 36 and above. The survey aimed to explore teachers’ perceptions of implementation challenges and coping strategies.

Table 1Title

Urban/Rural	Urban kindergarten	150	75.0%
	Rural kindergarten	50	25.0%
gender	Male	5	2.5%
	female	195	97.5%
age	≤25	60	30.0%
	26–35	85	42.5%
	≥36	55	27.5%

5. Countermeasures and Conclusion

Policy Recommendations

5.1 Strengthen systematic teacher training

Some teachers misunderstand the policy, equating “play-based learning” with “aimless play.”^[15] Authorities should regularly organize training on policy interpretation, developmentally appropriate practices, and play-based curriculum design. Special attention should be given to rural and private kindergarten teachers.

5.2 Improve school-based professional development

Teachers often lack peer support and opportunities for reflective practice. Suggested measures include establishing school-based learning communities on “de-primary schooling,” encouraging the sharing of play-based cases, and promoting action research and peer evaluations.

5.3 Optimize home-kindergarten collaboration

Parental expectations for early academics undermine teachers’ confidence. Kindergartens should host regular lectures and open days to communicate scientific child-rearing concepts, showcase children’s progress in non-academic activities, and strengthen feedback mechanisms with families^[16].

5.4 Enhance supervision and incentives

Currently, some kindergartens prioritize results over processes, with weak oversight. It is recommended to:

- Develop evaluation indicators to monitor compliance;
- Incorporate policy execution into annual assessments;
- Reward innovative teachers and schools adopting play-based teaching with recognition and funding.

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