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Parent's Perceptions on Pre-school Education in China: An Analysis

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Abstract

Parents are the first teachers in the children's life and they actively admit their children in the preschool program. Pre-school education has been considered as a significant part of education system in China. This study aims to explore parents' perceptions on preschool education of their children in China. In addition, this study has focused parental opinions about the importance and challenges for children to attend early childhood education and parental support for their children

attend the individual interviews. The findings show that all the participants agreed that preschool education is important as this period of infancy is vital for learning and development.

Keywords: Parents, Perceptions, Preschool

Introduction

Statement of the Problem

Education is a burning issue and it is gaining importance all over the world day by day. Early childhood education is assuming importance within the countries. China has a long history of preschool education but formally it was introduced in 1903 (Hui,2013).Despite the fact that pre-school education in China is considered as a significant social service, this education is not included under China's obligatory education system and it completely depends on parents' willingness (Zhou,2011). Everybody knows that majority of the new parents in China have got a standard quality education than their previous generations. For this reason, the new parents have different outlooks in regards to decisions relating schooling of their children, because China's education system is disgracefully rigorous and illustrated by extreme competition. As a result, many parents choose to have their children join in kindergartens or early childhood education centers. In this regard, this study has designed to examine the Chinese parents' perceptions on preschool education.

Background of the Study

After the birth of children, parents immediately get control of their children and become part of the experiences they desire to explore with their children. Most parents believe that the perfect timing for young children to learn should be as early as possible. Most people agreed that children have incredible capacities to learn earlier (Zhu and Zhang, 2008). But whether the parents decide to send their child to a local school or an international school and they should get ready for a very competitive admission process, a determined education system in general and tuition fees that might badly impact their cost of living. Children those who are enrolled in nurseries as an early childhood education centers which are usually established by private units and it provides care for children from birth to three years of age. In the meantime, children aged from 3-6 attend private or public kindergartens, which care and educate (Rao,2012) and may also participate in extracurricular classes such as those for dancing and drawing (UNESCO, 2006). It is commonly accepted that early childhood education is a key for individual progress and well-being (Children in Europe,2008; Schulman and Barnett,2005) .It is ever more seen as portion of the human capital of a society (Rolnick and Grunewald,2003). Many studies show that there is an encouraging impact of preschool education on early literacy, social emotional learning and academic achievement of the children (Barnett, Carolan, Fitzgerald and Squires,2012). The proficiency achieve from preschool attendance comprise pre-reading strategies, such as verbal language and phonological awareness and pre-writing skills. These proficiencies and practice before kindergartens enhanced the opportunity for students to have flourishing reading experiences in schools (Barnett et al., 2012). Supporting this ideas many researchers agree that children between the ages of three and five are in vital phases of

system in china. This study has explored the parents' perception on preschool education in china. It discusses the perception of parents about their children's pre-school education; it includes their opinion and support, importance, advantages and disadvantages of the preschool education to their children.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study is to explore the parents' perceptions on preschool education in China. In order to get a deeper understanding of the topic, the study will address some specific objectives which are as follows:

Specific Objectives:

1. To explore the importance of the preschool education programs in China as parent's perceptions.
2. To identify the problems faced by the parents while sending their children to the kindergartens in China.
3. To find out parents' support to their children's learning at home in China.

Significance of the study:

We hope this study will be helpful for the parents and educators as well as for the policy makers and other decision makers those who are directly involved with the education system in China. This study will bring some outcomes that will help the facilitators to plan and implement strategies to engage families with the different preschool programs. In this study we will also search for the disadvantages of preschool program, I hope the outcomes will be helpful for the authorities of the nurseries, kindergartens and pre-primary schools, they will be more careful about their reputation and services as well.

Limitations of the Study:

A major limitation of this study is the small sample size. Another limitation is the lack of relevant data, as the preschool education programs recently has given emphasized so in this field, much research has not been done. I collected my data near to my residence in Beijing. As a capital city Beijing is more developed than other parts of China, so it is also a major limitation because the preschool system is different in urban and rural area and I did not discuss about the rural preschool education system in China. As a new researcher, I think, my knowledge is also a limitation in this field.

Research Questions

In this study, parents' understandings on the pre-school education in China are the main subject matter to discuss. In order to get further understanding the study will describe the importance of preschool education in China. Finally, the last question will bring the discussion how do the parent

2. What are the problems faced by the parents when their babies are attending preschool programs in China?
3. How do parents support their children's learning at home in China?

Literature Review

Definition of the key terms

Parents:

The term parents, I have used in this study is to mean mothers and fathers of children. Especially the parents I have interviewed for my research that those who are sending their children to take preschool education in China.

Perceptions:

The term perception, I have used in this literature is to describe the beliefs of parents regarding preschool education and it includes attitudes, opinions, observation, supports, beliefs and values. For the purpose of the study, perceptions, I have used to refer to the parents' expression of their awareness or understanding of the nature or purpose of preschool education.

Preschool Education:

Preschool education refers to nurseries, kindergartens and pre-primary education programs. Preschool education, I have used in this study, is the education from kindergartens in China and in this kindergartens mainly serve 3 to 6 year olds children in China.

Pre-School Education System in China

As the China has the world biggest population, so here education is very much demanding and competitive among the Chinese population and it has a great status in the world. China started nine years of compulsory education from 1986 that includes six years of primary education and three years of secondary education (Zhu,2002). At present there are different levels of schooling like; kindergarten for three years, primary school for six years and secondary education for three to six years and higher education for several years in China (Zhu,2002). Local education authorities are mainly responsible to run primary schools and kindergarten schools locally but in some cases private enterprises also run kindergartens and primary schools in the local areas. Though the financial system of China is increasing very quickly over the recent years, still there is challenge for running preschool education. The gross enrollment of preschool children was only 50.9 per cent in 2009 for the children aged 3-6 (Zhou, 2011). In the past, the government could not take adequate responsibility for the preschool education. For example, the government did not employ enough workforce in the area of ECE management and they invested very low for this reason preschool program decreased in that years (Liu,2010). But in the recent years, the central government has

childhood, researchers, teacher trainers, university professors, as well as, program directors, administration employees, parents, etc enthusiastically contribute in the process (Zhou,2011). The government plans to offer the target of better entrance to early childhood programs countrywide by the year 2020 to build an early childhood public education service system; and in conclusion to progress scientific expansion of early childhood education on a state basis (Zheng,2010).

According to the law of compulsory education of China (National People's Congress, 2006), the age of primary school entry is six years (Rao N., et al.,2012). There are three kinds of preschool program for children below 6; such as nurseries, kindergarten and pre- primary programs. Nurseries provide children under age 3 and kindergartens refer to full-day long programs serving children from age 3 to age 6. It includes food, game and sleeping.Above 20 per cent of the three to six year olds go to kindergarten(Zhong,1989). The programs provides the two types of purpose of child care and educational preparation (Caldwell,1990). A range of sources gives kindergarten programs- the government, licensed private individuals and neighborhood committees and work units and it also explains that preschool education is significant for young children's health, habit formation and intellectual improvement. Early childhood programs required to admit children's developmental nature, use scientific teaching methods and make sure that children develop in a healthy and happy manner (Zhou ,2011). Learning fields include hygiene, and health, language, social science, natural science, and art. Kindergartens authorities use some techniques to guide children actively, confidently to learn new things (UNESCO,2006).

Kindergarten groups children by age; there are three grouping anticipated by the government regulation in 1981; junior (3- years old), middle (4-years old) and seniors (5- years old) (Cleverley,1985). Education replace with physical care as the most important activity in this program. Class size enhances with age, ranging from 20 to 40 children. For pre-school classes, there are no more than 12 instructional classes per week and the duration of every class is thirty minutes. There is no testing system at the pre-school level (UNESCO,2006).Each class usually has two teachers and a nurse. Another type preschool program is the pre-primary classroom and it is a subdivision of the elementary school. It is usually a half day program preparing children the year prior to 1st grade. The pre- primary classrooms connected with elementary schools,t hey always put stress academic goals and the kindergartens' parents often want their children to begin scholarly work early, (Zhu,2002) believing it will give these a head start in the competitive effort for scholastic success- considered the major path of future chances (Hawkins and stites,1991). The nationwide approved curriculum includes language, art, math, physical education, music and general knowledge, which is a mixture of science and social studies (Spodek,1988). Each session focuses upon a particular syllabus. Dancing and singing occupy a significant position in the curriculum. Yet, two years older boy/girl can take part in well-rehearsed public program of song and dance routines.

Objectives and aims of pre-school education in China

1. To ensure coordinated progress of children in terms of health, behavior and mental health.

4. To create knowledge on environment, learning motivation and practice ability.
5. To cultivate a love for family, hometown, homeland, labor and science.
6. To teach them honesty, confident, friendly, bravery, hard working, polite and disciplinary
7. To develop a primary experience, sentiment and ability of beauty (UNESCO, 2006).

Demand for Pre- school education from Kindergartens in China

The population of China has reached at 1.3 billion people; it has 56 national tribes, living in 23 provinces, and 5 autonomous regions and 4 municipalities (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2006). Beijing is the capital city of China and this municipality has over 13 million people (Hu and Szente ,2009).The kindergartens education in China is not financed by the government but a large number of parents are sending their children to kindergartens from early stage (age 2-3), usually for three years. Many primary schools in China call for children to first get preschool education so that the children will have better sociability. In China there were 77,300 public kindergartens and 146,400 private kindergartens of 2015. As the government has allocated more funding for preschool education, the percentage of public kindergartens has grown from 31.99 per cent to 34.56 per cent from 2010 to 2015. In 2015, 19.62 million children were admitted in public kindergartens, 23.02 million were in private kindergartens. Under the long term education reform and development plan (2010-2020), the net enrollment rate was expected to reach 70 per cent for three-year pre-school education. It was also expected 80 per cent for two year pre- school education and 95 per cent for one year preschool education by 2020. As of 2015, the actual net enrolment rate has increased from 50 per cent in 2009 to 75 percent in 2015 (Hu and Szente,2009). A Chinese family, no matter if it is poor or rich always places education as a top priority. Every parent aspirations his or her child to grow up to be doing well and it is believed that academic achievement is the only pathway that goal (Hu and Szente,2009). As soon as the children reach preschool age academic competition all over the country makes parents fearful and stressed about academic achievementof their babies (Zhu and Zhang,2008).Anyway, compared to developed countries with a net enrolment rate of around 90 percent, there is still gap for development. By the growing of the country's infant population for every year, the demand for preschool education (kindergartens) is estimated to increase.

Government initiative to establish pre-school education in China

Preschool education is not incorporated with the compulsory education system in China.It is regarded as the foundation stage for the subsequent school education and lifelong learning system. Pre-school education is normally designed to provide early childcare and education for children from the age of 3 to 6 or 7. The mission of pre-school education is to provide all-round education for children so that they can be well developed physically and mentally (Libing,2009).In the recent years, the ministry of education has applied the rules for the management of kindergartens, the instruction rules for the work of kindergarten as well as a sequence of other laws and regulations aimed at promoting the development of pre-school education. Local education

Country level governments administer pre-school education, while the central governments formulate laws, regulations, policies and development plans. Local governments at all levels are responsible for coordinating the development of regional plans and specific policies and they are also responsible for the daily administration of kindergartens. The ministry of education is doing for the betterment of the kindergartens while the ministry of Hygiene is responsible for the betterment of the nurseries(Corter, et al.,2006).The ministry of Education is in charge for the formulation of policies and principles as well as the management and professional guidance of the kindergartens. To meet the education needs of pre-school children, the Chinese government plans to universalize pre-school education by 2020 (Tsegay S.M. et al., 2017). To achieve this goal, country-level governments implemented the three-year pre-school Education action plan. This law requires that governments at all levels actively increase budgetary investment in pre-schools. For this reason, local governments have made a big number of public kindergartens in China. From this point, early childhood education in China is directed by the regulation on the process of kindergartens and become part of kindergarten education since 1996 (Wang,2008).

At the same time, the central government has endorsed private individuals and groups to establish private kindergartens. In 2014, the gross enrollment rate in three-year pre-school education reached 70 per cent, a figure which represents an increase of nearly 20 per cent over five years (National Bureau of statistics of china, 2015). In order to improve the quality of pre-school education, the Ministry of Education has issued other relevant documents such as regulations on the management of the kindergarten, kindergarten working regulations and professional standards for kindergarten teachers, through these documents, Chinese governments at all levels are strengthening oversight of kindergarten enrolment, safety, student health, education, quality and so on (OECD;2016)

Parents' attitudes to the pre-school education in China

Parental outlooks are essential as they give an active influence on their children's learning. Parents apply all their powers on their children's education (Young,1994), such like help children with their homework and promote children's second language learning. Most parents keep positive attitudes toward early childhood education (Barbara,1996) , since early childhood education programs provide strong nitty-gritty for subsequent learning and development; compensate for drawback and exclusion; and provide remuneration for children, families and societies (UNESCO,2006). They provide variety ways to support their children's learning and contract friendship with teachers. Most parent consider that their children attending language learning at early childhood, can gain more significant achievement (Na,2016).

Parents are primary stakeholders in early concern and schooling and the choices they make about early care and education have significant proposition for their children. Within the considerations that parents consider when choosing an early concern and education setting (e.g. cost, location, hours of care, etc), is the excellence of the care that their child will get by the caregiver and in the

setting up learning tasks, assisting children's learning through formal instructions (Li,2004). The Chinese have a rich tradition that gives importance to education and academic success, which are widely regarded as the only path to career attainment. Chinese parents have always been eager to get involved in children's education to secure a good start in the early years. They believe that they should nurture children's mind and that teachers should be strict disciplinarians to civilize students with knowledge and rules (Lau, Y.,2011).

Research Methodology

Qualitative Research Approach

In order to investigate the above mentioned question, a qualitative method has been utilized to get in-depth knowledge about the subject; qualitative research accurately searches for answering questions by examining various social settings. The study has been based on both primary and secondary data. The interview with the structured questionnaire is applied for collecting the primary data.The total respondent is 10, all are Chinese parents and their children go to kindergartens. Out of total respondents eight are female and two are male. The secondary data has been collected from the different sources like published articles, books, newspapers and internet.

Data Collection

The primary data has collected through interview. For data collection I chose the area where I am living and it is in Shahe University Park Area, Champing in Beijing. Here I visited two kindergartens to become familiar with their activities, and my baby is also going to one of the two kindergartens and I also interviewed two teachers those who are sending their babies to the kindergartens. A structured questionnaire has been used for getting answer from the respondents. A total eight questions were prepared for the respondents. The participants in this study were selected through snowball sampling. The selection of participants is prioritized on Chinese parents who have children in kindergartens. At first I contacted my friend (neighbor) who is the English teacher of Middle High School. I felt she has easily accessible to contacts with parents. Participants are provided substantial freedom to write detailed answers related to the themes.The interviews were taken from 20-27 August,2018.

Data analysis procedure

The primary data has been collected through interviews of 10 respondents. All are the parents of kindergarten going children. A total 8 questions were given to the participants. After collecting the data it was coded based on research questions, than categorized and then themes were prepared.The analysis is written through three sections, these are: importance of preschool education, challenges faced by the parents and parents' support for babies learning.Both primary and secondary data are used to write analysis.

Discussion and Findings

Importance of Preschool Education in China

The first research question of this study indicates the importance of preschool education programs

positive attitude to the preschool education of their children. There are two types of kindergarten in China, one is public and another is private. Public kindergarten is much competitive and private kindergarten is more expensive. Most of the Chinese families tried to send their children to the public kindergarten it has a limited number of seat. Children are joining in preschool education programs can suppose to advantage academically, socially and financially (Lasser and Fite,2011).There are many reasons that children participate in the kindergarten, these are socialization of babies, make self dependent, freely talk with others, play with other kids,practice of group work and etc. One respondent said:

> "There are of great importance for our kids, before the kindergarten, kids live at home with their parents, they are very lonely, besides, because they are the only kid and they are always spoiled, their parents and especially their grandparents will give whatever they want, as a result ,many kids become so selfish that they take others' love for granted, but after they come to the kindergarten, they will change gradually and slowly, they will respect others and share, what's more, they will be happier and more outgoing when they are in the kindergarten."

From this quotation it is very much clear that the kindergarten is a training institute of children. Children get different types of training from the school. This training is very much important for the future life of children; it will be the capital of them. In sociology it is talked that family is the learning center of all babies but kindergarten is also an important educational institution for the kids.This training from the kindergarten of the children makes different with the other children who do not join to the kindergarten.

One participant evaluates the importance of kindergarten, he said:

> "Because it is the best time for children to develop their brains before they are three years old, they can stimulate their brains potential through professional teachers guidance at school, and playing and learning with other children. Children can exercise their self control without relying too much on their parents."

Most of the participant's opine that Chinese government is paying more attention on preschool education, such as reading, dancing, games and parent-child activities. For this reason health care and equipment upgrading are also improving. Out of ten respondents seven respondents are agree that after attending the preschool programs children learn a good ability of communications, can play with their friends, learn to study with friends, become independent and responsible, develop their regular habits and be prepare for their school life. One respondent told that children have no patience to learn at home so it is better to send them at kindergarten and he also mentioned that making rule for them is important. Three respondents agreed that their babies has changed positively, like; become lively and cheerful, like to make friends with others, will help families ,do simple housework and no longer picky about food, and learned a lot of things for going to kindergartens and they (Parents) can manage their time to do their own work. One respondent mentioned that kindergarten could shape kids' personality and temperament.

> "The demand of kindergarten school is very big. The public kindergarten schools are difficult to enter. The private kindergarten schools are more expensive. Generally speaking, the educational qualities of public kindergarten schools are better than private kindergarten schools. Preschool education is important because this period is very important for the personality formation and habit formation. Children attending the kindergartens are more open and more like to communicate to others. Preschool education programs establish good habit of eating, more regular routine, learn more knowledge and be more polite."

Challenges faced by the parents in China

The second research question indicates the challenges faced by the parents when their children are attending preschool programs in China. Social abilities are supposed by parents to be an important part of the preschool skills, as well as a pioneer of academic ability (Webster, 1984). Kindergarten has become more and more academically challenging (Daily et al., 2011).Actually Chinese kindergarten is also maintaining the day care system. For that reason babies have been staying there from 9 am to 5 pm and sometimes till evening. This long separation between babies and parents could create a gap between each other. Different parents give their various opinions about the challenges faced by the parents.In answer to the second research question one respondent replied that she found some disadvantages of preschool education programs, for example, it gives more study pressure for this reason there is danger of losing interest in learning and also there is probability to imitate the bad habits of friends. Social skills are perceived by parents to be an important part of the preschool experience, as well as a pioneer of academic ability(Webster,1984).Out of ten respondents, five respondents agreed that they did not face any problems for sending their babies in the kindergartens. One respondent said that there is probability to get infectious diseases. Another respondent said, "The public kindergarten in China has really good control of what to learn and what they can learn. However, some of the private schools try to teach kids so many things that belong to elementary school. I think the education of private school is not corporate for kids' learning development".

Another respondent said, "Some kindergartens give children too much to learn (subjects of primary schools),some kindergartens there are too many children and their rules are too strict and some kindergartens attach too much importance to English". Another respondent said, "There are some, e.g.,I think they are not so good for discovering and developing the kids' personalities, kids are different and each kid has his/her own unique characteristics, but there are too many kids in the kindergarten, so some kids will be easily ignored".

Parents' support for babies' learning

The third research questions point out the parents support to their children's learning at home in China. In order to ready children for school admission, more class instructional time is needed in early childhood education programs(Chien et al.,2010).Most of the parents are more serious about their children's education and many have their plan of their children's education trajectory(Chen,2016).Many a times it happens to give more academic pressure of the children.

to do their homework. One respondent said that when her baby faces difficulties, she helps her but most of the time her baby deal with the problem in her own. Out of ten respondents eight respondents agreed that there is no need of additional teachers for their children as they are learning from the kindergartens and it is enough for their children. Two respondents said that they are keeping additional teacher at home for supporting their children.

Conclusion

It is well recognized that preschool education plays a significant role of development and learning of children. It is an important training for the children. Now a days with the influence of economic reforms, the one child policy and the ambition for highly successful children, parents attach more importance to children's education in China (Chen,2016). Most of the parents give importance on the children's emotional intelligence, for instance social ability, positive attitudes to life, emotional control and the ability to handle pressure(Chen,2016). If the children get a full training from the pre -school education, it is a great wealth of their total life. It shapes children's future personality and intellectuality. Here it is also important the perceptions of the parents on preschool education. Most of the parents opine unanimously that early childhood education is really important for children's development. The parents are satisfied with their babies' performances who participated in the kindergarten. However, there are few reservations of the parents on the pre -school education. The reservation does not exceed the satisfaction level of parents. Finally, parents' opinion is the most important achievement of the pre-school education in China. The future of the pre-school education will depend on the satisfaction of the parents who send their children to the Kindergartens. These children are the future of the China who will lead the whole world.

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Appendix

Interview Questions

1. What is your observation about the kindergarten school of your country?
2. Why kindergarten (Preschool education program) is important for your babies?
3. Do you think children have improved a lot after going to kindergarten?
4. Do you find any differences between who attended the kindergartens and who do not?
5. Have you find any disadvantages of the preschool programs?
6. Which subject do you teach your baby at home?
7. Do you help your baby to prepare homework given by the kindergartens?
8. Do you keep your baby's additional tutor at your house?

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