

Optimizing Guiyang's Universal Kindergarten Policy: Insights from Interview-Based Analysis

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to understand the effectiveness and implementation of the universal kindergarten policy in Guiyang City, China, through the interview method and to propose strategies for improvement. The qualitative survey research project involved selecting a representative of three government workers and three kindergarten principals from six districts in Guiyang City, Southwest China, to analyze the status and challenges of the implementation of the universal kindergarten policy in Guiyang City. The study found that there is a lack of high-quality educators in the universal kindergartens in Guiyang, as well as a need to strengthen the channels of policy dissemination. Based on these findings, the researchers made recommendations, including establishing a standardized training and employment mechanism for kindergarten teachers, building an international exchange platform for universal kindergarten teachers, and upgrading the teaching force to improve the quality of education. Policy dissemination channels were also enhanced to increase parents' awareness of the policy. The study also pointed out the limitations of this study, including sample limitations and problems with interviewing techniques. The study recommended that the sample be expanded to explore a broader range of policy issues in future studies. It is also recommended that the interests of the government, kindergartens, and parents in the process of policy formulation and implementation be considered to formulate more targeted policies to promote the equitable development of pre-primary education.

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INTRODUCTION

Pre-primary education is important and has a big impact on how a country develops its educational system (Xue & Li, 2021). Pre-primary education has significant importance in the overall development of a kid and serves as an integral element within China's educational framework. Over time, China has seen significant changes in its educational policies and institutions to improve cultural literacy, diminish educational inequities between urban and rural areas, and promote educational fairness (Xiang et al., 2020). Still up for debate, however, is how effective these regulations are in light of Guiyang City's plans for universal kindergarten.

Like many other Chinese regions, Guiyang City's pre-primary system has difficulties brought on by institutional frameworks, resource limitations, and differences between urban and rural areas. The prevalence of private kindergartens, driven by profit motives, has added complexity to the public-private dynamics of early childhood education (Feng, 2010). While private kindergartens have contributed to addressing enrollment challenges, their profit-oriented nature may hinder their full potential in achieving universal pre-primary education (Liang & Lu, 2023).

Economic growth and the progression of family planning policies, exemplified by the transition from the "One Couple, One Child" to the "Two-Child Policy," are inextricably linked in China (Wu, 2020). A renewed emphasis on comprehensive and equitable pre-primary education and the development of universal kindergartens is necessary due to the effect that rising education expenditures have had on the decline in birth rates (Li et al., 2017).

National policies such as the 'National Medium and Long-Term Education Reform and Development Plan (2010-2020)' and the 'Opinions of the State Council on the Current Development of Pre-primary Education' (Zhou & Zhou, 2019) paved the way for universal pre-primary education in China. These programs are intended to expand the share of universal kindergartens and give universal access to pre-primary education. However, the real execution and efficacy of these measures in Guiyang City must be examined. Guiyang City has been instrumental in fostering universal pre-primary education and kindergartens by aligning local policies with national objectives (Xue & Li, 2022). While progress has been achieved, Guiyang City continues to face economic and educational issues as a result of expanding urbanization (Yang, 2009).

Hence, this research endeavor fulfills a twofold objective: Initially, it endeavors to evaluate the efficacy of policy execution within the universal kindergarten system of Guiyang City. In doing so, we intend to identify the practical obstacles, results, effects, and benefits of the current policy implementation. Secondly, building upon the city's social and economic context, as well as policy documents and interview data, we endeavor to propose strategies for optimizing the universal kindergarten policy in Guiyang City. Our ultimate objective is to increase the effectiveness of policy implementation by assisting in the establishment of superior universal kindergartens across the area.

Literature Review

Review of International Literature on Universal Pre-primary Education

Globally, researchers are interested in China's universal pre-primary education policies, influenced by economic prosperity, changing parental attitudes, and educational reforms. Efficient policy implementation significantly impacts China's universal kindergarten growth (Qin, 2012). Current Chinese research focuses on crafting viable financial support and admission standards for universal kindergartens (Engel et al., 2015; Rose, 2010). Regulations are critical for expansion and sustainability. Education-related legislation is another critical area in China. Laws and regulations are being promoted to provide legal protection for universal kindergartens, drawing from Western experiences. To support kindergarten growth, increased financial investment, enhanced government accountability, and strengthened oversight are imperative. Evaluating policy implementation is essential to advance educational equity and inform policy reform (Wu, 2011). Coordinating pre-primary education and merging daycare and kindergarten programs better serve parents and children.

In summary, future research in China will focus on improving teacher preparation, developing curricula, and encouraging integrated development with childcare services. In universal kindergarten policy, scholars will shift focus from guiding policy development to

addressing implementation issues and evaluating effectiveness. This ensures that research forms a closed-loop system, promoting kindergarten development and advancing China's early childhood education.

In contrast, Western countries have embraced "Universal Early Childhood Education." Post-World War II, they recognized early childhood education's importance, investing in comprehensive programs. Initiatives like the UK's "Sure Start" (Glass, 1999) and the US's "Head Start" (2000) aimed to ensure equal access to early childhood education. Early Western studies emphasized the social and economic benefits of universal early childhood education. Developing a qualified workforce became a priority, given its importance to national development (Xue & Li, 2022). The main challenge was a lack of qualified early childhood education specialists, requiring substantial teacher training investments. Despite costs, it was viewed as a worthwhile long-term investment (Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 2003; Karoly et al., 1998). Recent Western research focuses on addressing educational inequities, especially among marginalized groups. Scholars advocate public funding initiatives to improve their educational opportunities (Arvola et al., 2017; Barnett, 2010). Government policies play a crucial role in advancing universal early childhood education (Barnett, 2008). Scholars emphasize teacher preparation, streamlining administration, harmonizing development, and integrating universal early childhood education into public policies (Karch, 2010).

Legal frameworks like the "No Child Left Behind" program (Bush, 2001) ensure equal access to education. Recent Western studies evaluate the quality and effectiveness of universal early childhood education (Belfield & Schwartz, 2007; Britto et al., 2011; Dahlberg et al., 2013; Moss, 2016), emphasizing effective teaching, holistic child development, and teacher professionalism. Governments are urged to enhance standards and invest in teachers. While universal pre-primary education has made significant strides in Western nations, research is needed to understand policy implementation, resource allocation, and organizational efficiency. These insights optimize policies, supporting children's development and success.

Research Method

Design

The purpose of this study is to obtain the current status of the implementation of the universal kindergarten policy in Guiyang City with the help of interviews and to find strategies to improve the effectiveness of the policy implementation. The researcher used the interview method with the aim of elaborating the participants' (government officials and kindergarten directors) views on the development of universal kindergartens and the implementation of the policy. Thus, some of the problems that exist in the implementation process of the universal kindergarten policy in Guiyang City can be explored more deeply, helping the researcher to propose more targeted strategies to optimize the implementation of the policy.

Participants and context

The study area was chosen in six urban areas of Guiyang City: Yunyan District, Nanming District, Guanshanhu District, Huaxi District, Baiyun District, and Wudang District. The researcher chose three representative government workers and three kindergarten directors as interview subjects to analyze the implementation of the policy in the above areas.

Table 1 Research Participants and Context

Method	Participants	Context
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Interview	Three government officials and three universal kindergarten principals	In six major urban areas of Guiyang City, namely, Yunyan District, Nanming District, Guanshanhu District, Huaxi District, Baiyun District, and Wudang District
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Research instrument

Interview

Based on the policy formulation and actual development of universal kindergartens in Guiyang City, a semi-structured interview guide called *Interview Outline of the Effectiveness of the Implementation of Universal Kindergarten Policy in Guiyang City* was developed. The interview outline comprises fourteen inquiries that pertain to the problems or objectives of the universal kindergarten policy. The semi-structured interview format affords respondents increased autonomy in expressing themselves and provides greater latitude in the process of gathering data (Kallio et al., 2016). The researcher of this study may be able to enrich the interview data with semi-structured interviews.

Data collection and analysis

The present research utilized interview data that was gathered in those above six primary urban areas of Guiyang City. To facilitate the organization of the interview materials, distinct interview data from various participant categories were coded in accordance with the interview questions and conduct order. "Interview order - interviewee type - question number" will be the format utilized for the coding. "K" represents a kindergarten principal, while "G" represents a government official. For instance, the code for the third government official's response to the initial question was "3-G-Q1", whereas the code for the kindergarten principal's response to the third question was "1-K-Q3".

Findings

The Insufficiency of High-Quality Educators in Universal Private Kindergartens:

Talent plays a crucial role in the development of the education sector, particularly in early childhood education. The quality of educators significantly impacts children's growth and the overall educational experience. In Guiyang City, there is a clear challenge facing private universal kindergartens when it comes to attracting and training high-quality teachers. This challenge encompasses multiple aspects, notably teachers' academic qualifications, professionalism, social status, and salaries. Interviews reveal that most kindergarten teachers in Guiyang City are graduates of specialized colleges and universities, with very few undergraduates opting to work in universal kindergartens, especially private ones. This results in a lack of diversity in the educational backgrounds of kindergarten teachers and lower teacher qualifications. Additionally, the low salaries and societal perception of kindergarten teachers hinder efforts to attract and retain high-quality educators, ultimately impeding the improvement of universal pre-primary education quality and the sustainability of kindergartens.

Efforts to Increase Policy Publicity:

To meet the demand for quality pre-primary education in Guiyang City, government departments have implemented various policies, such as supporting and promoting universal kindergartens. However, a common issue in policy implementation is the limited dissemination of these policies, resulting in insufficient awareness and recognition of universal kindergartens

among parents. From the parents' perspective, cultural literacy and social class limitations hinder their ability to access information about universal kindergarten policies. This lack of understanding makes it challenging for parents to grasp policy changes and fee adjustments, affecting the smooth operation of universal kindergartens. Furthermore, despite the positive aspects of the policy, many parents and kindergarten directors may have misconceptions about the quality of teaching in universal kindergartens. Some may choose universal kindergartens primarily based on price, not fully recognizing the government's efforts to improve teaching quality in these institutions.

Discussion

The quality of educators poses an additional hurdle. Currently, in universal kindergartens, particularly private ones, many early childhood teachers hail from specialized institutions due to budget constraints. Consequently, there is a low presence of bachelor's degree holders in these institutions. This leads to a lack of diversity in the academic composition of the teaching staff, resulting in relatively lower academic standards among teachers. Such limitations curtail the capacity to offer high-quality, universal pre-primary education. This mirrors the findings of Zhao and Sun (2019) research, highlighting financial constraints faced by universal kindergartens, notably private ones, which hinder competitive salary packages for teachers. Furthermore, the social standing of early childhood teachers in Guiyang City is relatively low, making it challenging to draw and groom high-caliber educators, ultimately hampering teaching quality. This observation aligns with Lin (2017) study, which underscores the impact of traditional stereotypes and societal biases on teacher identity and motivation, negatively influencing the overall teaching force's quality.

The interviews also revealed the need for broader government policy outreach. While policies related to universal kindergartens in Guiyang City are promoted to some extent, the approach primarily involves offline outreach with selected parent representatives. However, due to varying cultural literacy and social backgrounds among parents, many struggle to comprehend the policy details, resulting in limited recognition of universal kindergartens and adversely affecting policy implementation. Xuan (2015) similarly noted that community and parent understanding of these policies remains inadequate, often overlooking government efforts in constructing and developing universal kindergartens. Yuan and Fang (2014) research added that insufficient government efforts in policy promotion not only hinder parent comprehension but also confound private kindergarten directors, diminishing the actual impact of universal kindergartens during policy implementation.

As a result of these discoveries, the following recommendations arise: 1) Standardize Teacher Training and Employment: To ensure uniformity in the training and employment of universal kindergarten teachers, Guiyang should establish a mechanism for this purpose. These encompass initiatives such as international exchange programs designed to foster professional development, regionally driven resource allocation, and strategies aimed at enhancing teacher remuneration, standing, and career advancement. 2) Enhance Policy Publicity Channels: To foster greater comprehension and awareness among parents, it is recommended that the government augment its policy publicity endeavors. This entails proactively seeking feedback, utilizing contemporary information media for distribution, and establishing a platform for sharing information to streamline collaboration and resource distribution. The objective of these recommendations is to modify the challenges that have been identified and improve the efficacy of the universal kindergarten policy in Guiyang City. This will ultimately ensure that all children and families have improved access to pre-primary education of superior quality.

Conclusion

Government departments need to continue to broaden the publicity channels of the universal kindergarten policy, promote the change of ideological concepts, and involve parents in the construction and development of universal kindergartens to provide a strong public foundation for the implementation of the policy to improve the effectiveness of the policy. However, there are also shortcomings in this study. First, the sample of this study only focuses on the original six urban areas of Guiyang. With the expansion of Guiyang's administrative boundaries, this sample ignores newer areas, reducing the applicability of the findings. To improve generalization, future studies should consider including the city's newest administrative districts or similar cities. Second, this study used interviews to measure the perceptions of government officials and universal kindergarten directors on the effectiveness of the policy. In future research on universal kindergarten policies, an attempt could also be made to explore the effectiveness of the implementation of rural universal kindergarten policies in Guiyang or other less-developed provincial capitals in China.

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