

# Equity and Quality in Early Childhood Education: Promoting Preschool Education Development through Legislation

Peiyu Gu

Nanjing Normal University, Nanjing 210024, Jiangsu, China

*“Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire.”  
—William Butler Yeats*

**P**RESCHOOL education is now recognized as foundational to basic education and the most cost-effective among all levels of education throughout the whole life of the individual. Early childhood education is of vital importance for individuals’ healthy development, lifelong educational attainment, and the quality of their family life. Moreover, equitable quality preschool education is of strategic significance to social stability and economic development as well as a nation’s international competitiveness.

Opportunity and quality of preschool education are both crucial as nobody’s early childhood is repeatable (Feng & Zhou, 2011). The UNESCO’s “The World Declaration on Education for All (1990)” emphasizes the necessity of providing education for all children, youth, and adults (UNESCO, 1990). “The Dakar Framework for Action” proclaims “expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children” to be one of its primary goals (UNESCO, 2000. P. 8). The 2015’s “Incheon Declaration: Education 2030: Towards Inclusive and Equitable Quality Education and Lifelong Learning for All” encourages the “provision of at least one year of free and compulsory quality pre-primary education and that all children have access to quality early childhood development, care, and education” (UNESCO, 2015. P. 2).

Amid the growing recognition of the importance of preschool education in the international community, its development encounters unprecedented challenges, such as shortages of preschool education resources, inequity in early childhood education, and in-

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sufficient quality of preschool education. In the context of the rapid social development, addressing major issues with preschool education through legislation has become a global trend (Pang & Xia, 2013). The developmental history of global early childhood education shows that a complete preschool education law system helps guarantee the right of young children to pre-primary education and potentially gives impetus to improving the level of preschool education. An increasing number of countries are applying the “standard of human rights” to legislation on early childhood education to ensure children’s enjoyment of the right to this education. Nations and territories such as the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Brazil, Mexico, Sweden, Hungary, Taiwan of China, and the Macao Special Administrative Region have enacted specialized preschool education law or have set forth targeted and detailed provisions on the universalization of preschool education in relevant education law. Furthermore, in response to the actual needs, a wide range of preschool education policies have been formulated in a timely manner. By doing so, authoritative and mandatory norms have been established for the universalization of preschool education as well as for the resolution of practical issues encountered in its implementation (Li, 2019).

Currently, Chinese preschool education is experiencing a rapid growth, involving a large pre-primary-age population, which poses a demand for higher-order legislative guarantee. On June 2, 2023, the Executive Meeting of the State Council of China approved the *Preschool Education Law of the People’s Republic of China (Draft)*. *Issues with Chinese Preschool Education and Implications of the Preschool Education Law of the People’s Republic of China (Draft)* published in this issue focus on the problem of advanced education in Chinese kindergartens and its harms and expound on the significance of the Preschool Education Law for developing a more scientific pre-primary curriculum that takes the characteristics of young children’s physical and mental development as the primary consideration, underscores the role of games in implementing preschool education, and respects preschoolers’ right to play (Yao, 2023). It is hoped that this article will arouse more interest in and discussion on the law.

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**Correspondence to:**

Peiyu Gu  
Nanjing Normal University  
Nanjing  
Jiangsu  
China  
E-mail: [354953165@qq.com](mailto:354953165@qq.com)

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