

The Practical Dilemmas and Optimization Paths of Private Bilingual Preschool Education in China: A Three-Dimensional Perspective Based on Faculty, Curriculum, and Evaluation

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Abstract. Under the context of globalization, private bilingual preschool education has gained increasing attention as a critical pathway for fostering children's language abilities and comprehensive development. However, its implementation still faces numerous practical challenges. Building upon Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, this study establishes a tripartite analytical framework encompassing 'faculty, curriculum, and evaluation' and systematically explores the issues in current practices by integrating research on bilingual education literature at home and abroad and China's private education policy texts. The study identifies major challenges, including the lag in professional development of teaching staff, insufficient innovation in teaching methods, and the lack of a comprehensive curriculum evaluation system. Accordingly, this paper proposes three optimization strategies: first, strengthening the professional training and continuous development of teaching staff; second, advancing the contextualization and methodological innovation in bilingual pedagogy; and third, establishing a scientific and systematic evaluation system for bilingual preschool education. By deconstructing the three-dimensional framework, this study provides practical references to facilitate curriculum contextualization and teacher toolkit development, including dynamic assessment instruments.

Keywords: private preschool education, bilingual teaching, teacher development, curriculum reform, ecological systems theory

1. Introduction

As the trend of educational globalization intensifies, bilingual preschool education has increasingly become a significant focus in both domestic and international educational research, serving as a crucial pathway to enhance children's language abilities and cross-cultural literacy. In the context of China, private bilingual preschool education has garnered widespread academic attention due to its unique role in expanding high-quality educational resources and addressing diverse language needs. In recent years, research has primarily focused on its developmental pathways, challenges

encountered during its development, and corresponding solutions, covering aspects such as teacher capacity building, curriculum design, and the creation of language environments. For instance, Zhang pointed out that current bilingual preschool curricula lack sufficient localization adaptability [1]. Yang further emphasized significant shortcomings in teacher competency, family collaboration, and curriculum design within China's bilingual preschool education. Notably, the issue of uneven development in ethnic regions is particularly pronounced [2]. At present, research on private bilingual education often exhibits a single-dimensional characteristic. Jiang and Ye, using keyword clustering methods, found that research hotspots are concentrated on teachers' professional development, cross-cultural competence, and curriculum integration, but there has been little in-depth exploration of how these elements collaboratively construct a systematic educational ecosystem [3]. Liu and Dong further highlighted the issue of bilingual teacher shortages but did not propose systematic solutions that integrate curriculum and evaluation systems [4]. Given the strong coupling relationship among faculty, curriculum, and evaluation in the private education context (e.g., low salaries preventing teachers from implementing high-cost curricula), single-dimensional research can no longer reveal the essence of the problem. Therefore, this paper aims to construct a three-dimensional analytical perspective of "faculty-curriculum-evaluation," employing a combination of literature analysis and policy review methods to identify key challenges in the practice of private bilingual preschool education and propose optimization pathways. The practical significance of this study lies in providing structured improvement suggestions for teaching management in private institutions, offering feasible references to enhance the quality of bilingual education and promote educational equity. This will ultimately benefit frontline teachers and preschool children.

2. Theoretical basis

Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory offers a robust framework for examining private preschool bilingual education.

The theory conceptualizes individual development as shaped by nested hierarchical systems spanning proximal to distal contexts, including the microsystem (e.g., family, school), mesosystem (interactions between microsystems), exosystem (institutions that indirectly affect development, such as educational policies), macrosystem (culture, societal values), and chronosystem (the influence of environmental and temporal changes on development) [5]. Using the ecological systems theory, this study attempts to understand and analyze the practice of private preschool bilingual education within these five systems: the professional development of teachers falls under the microsystem category, directly impacting children's learning experiences; teaching methods operate within the mesosystem through dynamic interactions between teachers, parents, and institutional actors; while the teaching evaluation system is often influenced by the exosystem, such as educational policy orientations and government regulatory mechanisms. An ecological integration framework enables holistic comprehension of operational dynamics and systemic challenges.

At the same time, private kindergartens, as an important component of China's preschool education system, exhibit operational characteristics that are distinctly different from public kindergartens in terms of institutional design and management mechanisms. Firstly, most private kindergartens are market-oriented, with their operational goals placing greater emphasis on meeting parents' expectations for academic outcomes. As a result, some kindergartens tend to adopt "primary school-style" teaching strategies to cater to parental expectations [6]. Secondly, teacher turnover rates are relatively high, primarily due to factors such as teachers' weak sense of control over their profession, insufficient professional identity, and limited career development pathways [7].

Additionally, due to the diverse composition of parent groups in private kindergartens and the significant differences in their educational demands, curriculum and teaching arrangements often need to be flexibly adjusted based on parental expectations, placing greater emphasis on personalized and differentiated educational services. These characteristics collectively form the unique operational context of private kindergartens in implementing bilingual education.

3. Analysis of the limitations of private bilingual preschool education in China

3.1. Lagging professional development of faculty

Faculty's Professional Competence: Many bilingual teachers currently exhibit dual competency gaps in English language instruction and early childhood pedagogy. Yang pointed out that some bilingual teachers lack systematic training in preschool education, leading to insufficient understanding of child development principles, inadequate design of play-based teaching, and limited ability to apply language in contextualized settings [2]. Although demonstrating adequate linguistic competence, some teachers' limited grasp of developmental stage theory impedes their capacity to scaffold language instruction according to children's cognitive readiness. This structural imbalance of being "strong in English but weak in early childhood education" or "strong in early childhood education but weak in English" is particularly pronounced in private institutions and has become a critical bottleneck restricting teachers' ability to perform effectively in bilingual roles. Furthermore, a growing misalignment emerges between tertiary English curricula and the actual competency demands of early childhood English teaching roles. Most English courses offered in early childhood education programs at universities still focus on grammar and reading, neglecting the cultivation of core teaching skills such as oral expression, classroom interaction, and play-based teaching.

Structural Contradictions in Faculty

1) Disparities in educational backgrounds. While bilingual preschool education demand surges nationwide, stark disparities persist in teachers' professional qualifications and pedagogical training. Liu and Dong conducted field research on bilingual preschool education in rural areas of China and found that the lack of bilingual teachers has become a major bottleneck restricting the quality of education [4]. The study calls for strengthening the development of bilingual teaching staff and suggests alleviating the talent shortage through infrastructure investment and professionalization reforms. 2) Gender imbalance among teachers. Pronounced teacher gender imbalance further undermines educational diversity and instructional quality. In recent years, the proportion of female teachers in China's preschool education sector has been significantly higher than that of male teachers, with the low representation of male teachers weakening the diversity of educational roles. Zhou's longitudinal study demonstrated that male teacher absence induces classroom gender role stereotyping, adversely impacting children's gender cognition and social behavior formation [8].

3.2. Insufficient innovation in teaching methods

China's ongoing preschool reform prioritizes localized adaptation and multimodal innovation in bilingual pedagogy. According to the "Regulations on Preschool Education Work (Trial)," preschool education should focus on "child-centered" teaching methods, promoting education models based on play and experience, especially "immersive language learning." The "Outline of the Medium- and Long-Term Plan for Education Reform and Development" also explicitly requires preschool education to emphasize early language development, particularly the exploration and practice of bilingual education.

3.2.1. Mechanization of teaching methods

The mechanization of teaching methods is a common issue. Many teachers rely on traditional and inflexible teaching models, demonstrating limited capacity for personalized scaffolding aligned with learners' developmental trajectories. Yang criticizes that some teachers still use the English-Chinese translation teaching method, overlooking contextualized language immersion and pragmatic application, which affects the development of children's authentic language use abilities [2]. In current bilingual practices, the "cramming" teaching method still dominates, constraining learner autonomy and peer-mediated interaction, thereby hindering the coordinated development of their language and cognitive abilities. Tang et al. found that although many kindergarten English teachers believe that ideal English learning activities should be "continuous, coherent, and regular," in actual teaching, teachers generally stick to a single teaching method, lacking diversity and interactive design [9]. This overly mechanical teaching approach not only limits children's interest in learning but also affects the improvement of their language skills.

3.2.2. Lack of innovative practices

In the practice of preschool bilingual education, many teachers mainly rely on standardized textbooks and formulaic teaching processes, resulting in pedagogic rigidity that stifles methodological innovation. Yang pointed out that although bilingual education is gradually gaining attention, in specific teaching processes, some teachers still follow fixed templates for instruction, with monotonous teaching activities and insufficient interaction, neglecting the adaptability to the local educational context and the innovative design of teaching content [2]. This high dependence on textbooks and standardized processes weakens teachers' ability to dynamically adjust based on children's developmental levels and interests, thereby limiting the improvement of teaching effectiveness. On the other hand, the application of technological tools in preschool bilingual education is also relatively lacking. Research shows that the lack of technological tools significantly reduces classroom interactivity and student engagement, limiting the implementation of innovative teaching methods. Liu and Dong pointed out that although modern educational technology is gradually developing, many bilingual education classrooms in kindergartens still use traditional teaching methods, neglecting the use of modern educational technology and interactive tools [4].

3.2.3. Disconnect between reform and implementation

In the process of implementing reforms in preschool bilingual education, some teachers have failed to fully adopt the student-centered teaching philosophy, continuing to focus on task completion instead. As Fan critically observed, the 'student-centered' pedagogical approach remains inadequately implemented in China's preschool education reform initiatives [10]. Many teachers still habitually rely on traditional teaching methods, neglecting the new curriculum standards' emphasis on children's subjectivity. Educational practices are more centered around task completion rather than the development of individual students. Similarly, in preschool bilingual education, classrooms remain textbook-centered and fail to design courses based on children's interests. Niu analyzed the current state of preschool education curriculum reform and found that, despite policy documents emphasizing that bilingual education should be based on children's interests and needs, many preschool education practices are still dominated by textbooks, lacking flexibility and interactivity [11]. Such textbook-dominant paradigms not only constrain learner autonomy and creative expression but also impede the cognitive depth required for second language acquisition.

3.3. Incomplete evaluation system

The prevailing bilingual assessment framework manifests a fundamental incongruity with established patterns of childhood language acquisition. Specifically, the evaluation indicators remain focused on traditional cognitive language abilities (e.g., vocabulary size, phonetic accuracy), neglecting cross-linguistic transfer and contextual adaptability. For instance, Zhou et al. studied bilingual children in Singapore and found that phonetic and grammatical skills across different languages are interrelated, while vocabulary skills are highly dependent on family language input, showing asymmetrical development between languages [12]. This finding suggests that when evaluating bilingual children, it is inappropriate to use the language standards of a single language as a reference or to assess language skills in isolation, as this would underestimate their overall language development. Contemporary evaluation protocols exhibit excessive dependence on decontextualized quantitative instruments (e.g., standardized vocabulary inventories, proficiency scaling metrics). While these evaluations offer comparability and practicality, they fail to capture the complexity and dynamic changes in children's language development. Shani et al. noted that standardized scales like the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT) can provide quantitative measures of language skills but do not reflect children's strategic, contextual, and individualized nuances in language use and development [13].

4. Current optimization strategies for preschool bilingual education in China

4.1. Strategies for cultivating and enhancing teacher competence

First, for pre-service preschool bilingual teachers, higher education institutions offering preschool education programs should introduce courses such as "Theories of Child Language Acquisition" and "Play-Based Teaching Methods" to strengthen English pronunciation standards and situational teaching abilities. Second, a diversified in-service teacher training system should be established. This system should include tiered training, school-based research, and regional joint seminars to enhance teachers' language teaching skills and practical competence. Yang and Rao pointed out that teachers generally believe individualized guidance and practice-oriented research activities help boost their confidence and effectiveness in bilingual teaching [14]. Regarding recruitment mechanisms, Yang suggested constructing a more open, professional, and structurally sound talent acquisition system through measures such as "targeted training in collaboration with normal universities," "reforming training mechanisms," and "introducing educators with multicultural backgrounds" [2]. In terms of technological approaches, online research platforms like "Web-Based Remote Training Platform" can be introduced to support teachers in participating in continuous training, case studies, and teaching simulations remotely. Leveraging AI technology to predict teaching feedback and analyze customized growth paths can effectively address issues such as regional development disparities and uneven distribution of training resources.

4.2. Innovations in preschool bilingual education methods

While contemporary bilingual pedagogy routinely incorporates established methodologies—including Total Physical Response (TPR), systematic phonics instruction, and rhyming-based didactics—their implementation frequently demonstrates rigidity in pedagogical adaptation and insufficient methodological innovation. To achieve effective implementation of preschool bilingual education, the organic integration of native language and English curricula is particularly critical.

Zhang, in an immersive bilingual curriculum experiment conducted at a bilingual kindergarten in Beijing, proposed that integrating "language-based learning centers" and "interdisciplinary project-based designs" can simultaneously advance the teaching objectives of both Chinese and English, promoting children's coordinated development in language, cognition, and social skills [1]. Furthermore, in curriculum design, prioritizing native language for early cognitive development while embedding English in situational activities can effectively reduce language transfer barriers and enhance learning coherence and contextual relevance.

On the other hand, the localization of teaching methods is also considered an important pathway to promoting the sustainable development of preschool bilingual education. Yang and Wang pointed out that aligning with the trends of the times, multimedia teaching is a key approach to enhancing the effectiveness of bilingual education. They emphasized that multimedia resources such as videos and cartoons can effectively increase children's learning interest, making abstract language education more intuitive and vivid [15]. However, it is important to be cautious that if multimedia resources are limited to a "play-watch" one-way model, children may fall into "passive input." Teachers should utilize interactive touchscreens, AR scenarios, and other methods to transform the language tasks in cartoons into interactive games that children can operate and respond to (e.g., dragging words to corresponding objects), thereby maintaining a high level of cognitive engagement and language output.

4.3. Improving the evaluation system for preschool bilingual curriculum

As a linchpin in the pedagogical cycle, systematic curriculum evaluation serves dual imperatives: ensuring fidelity to predefined learning objectives while functioning as a quality assurance mechanism for bilingual education outcomes. However, the current imperfections in the bilingual teaching evaluation system limit its effective implementation. Over-reliance on quantitative data and the strong subjectivity of evaluation standards have become pressing issues that need to be addressed. In response to the issue of "insufficient cultural adaptability" in the current bilingual education evaluation system, Geng et al. pointed out that scientific evaluation strategies should fully consider the uniqueness of each child, including their language development level, ethnic cultural background, and family language environment [16]. Therefore, factors such as minority language acquisition ability and cross-cultural communication skills can be incorporated into the evaluation framework, and dynamic assessment tools focusing on bilingual thinking conversion ability can be developed to better reflect children's developmental potential in multilingual environments.

On this basis, Huang et al. proposed that when facing children's initial language learning difficulties, educators must transcend binary pass/fail judgments by implementing longitudinal formative assessment protocols—documenting micro-progressions in phonemic awareness, morphological acquisition, and pragmatic competence through structured observational rubrics [17]. She suggested that through continuous observation and adjustment, teachers should flexibly respond to children's developmental paths. Tools such as "language development observation diaries" or "classroom interaction records" can be introduced in practice for long-term tracking and reflective recording, thereby avoiding short-term, results-oriented evaluation biases. Furthermore, to construct a more comprehensive bilingual teaching evaluation system, Zhang et al. proposed the idea of building a multidimensional developmental bilingual curriculum evaluation system with both horizontal and vertical dimensions [18]. This perspective emphasizes both the diversity and comprehensiveness of evaluation while highlighting its specificity and effectiveness. Horizontally, diverse evaluation methods are used to comprehensively track teachers' professional competence

and teaching abilities; vertically, individual differences among students are deeply understood to formulate targeted teaching strategies.

5. Conclusion

This study systematically reveals the three major challenges currently faced by private bilingual preschool education from the three-dimensional perspective of "faculty-curriculum-evaluation": the lag in professional development of teaching staff, insufficient innovation in teaching methods, and the inadequacy of the evaluation system. Specific manifestations include the lack of professional competence among teachers and structural contradictions, mechanization of teaching methods; and the absence of localization, as well as the disconnection between evaluation indicators and developmental patterns. To address these issues, this paper proposes three optimization paths: first, setting up bilingual education-related courses in universities, improving the in-service training system, and introducing online teaching and research platforms; second, promoting the organic integration of native language and English courses, advancing the localization of teaching methods, and reasonably utilizing multimedia tools; third, developing culturally adaptive assessment tools and establishing formative and multidimensional evaluation systems. Since this study is primarily based on literature analysis and lacks empirical data, future research could focus on field surveys and case studies to further validate the practical effectiveness of the proposed paths.

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