

# Lack of regulations, industry disorder hinder China's early childhood education <sup>[1]</sup>

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## EXCERPTS

Young parents in China, most of whom were born during the third baby boom of the 1980s, are dumping the income into early childhood education and care centers – lest their children fall behind.

Even by 2011, early childhood care and education accounted for more than 35 percent of household expenditures among urban families. Many families spent 10,000 yuan each year, according to a survey by China Youth & Children Research Center.

The government made early education a part of its National Medium and Long-term Educational Reform and Development Plan (2010-2020), and promised it will increase preschool enrollment by 50 percent and open access to 40 million children by 2020. This would include three years of preschool for 70 percent of all children in China.

Even with such encouraging promises, early education still encounters a laundry list of problems in China. Causes range from government neglect to the education industry's own disorder.

### Totally Free Industry

While it has been ruled that children between the ages of three and six should have access to preschool, children under the age of three are not included in China's national educational system. Many private early education institutions and service centers have sprung up to fill the gap.

But without specific government provisions and restrictive industrial standards, the industry has become a breeding ground for unscrupulous individual merchants.

Since there are no specific regulations on the industry or a well-recognized education model, most early education institutions in China are registered as consulting companies or educational training centers to evade the gaze of local educational departments.

Setting up an early education institution is no different from founding an ordinary company. According to a Sohu report in 2014, more than 60 percent of such schools in China have nothing to do with the local educational department.

Furthermore, in terms of price-setting and teacher recruitment, private institutions play the roles of both players and the rule makers at the same time.

Most schools require a minimum order of 20 courses and offer discounts on more purchases. The unit price for a course is 260 yuan. Parents who buy 100 courses once can have a reduced price of 155 yuan, an employee at one early education school told Modern Express.

It's common to see early education institutions charging tens of thousands of yuan in tuition fees each year, according to Beijing Evening News.

In terms of the teacher recruitment, a research report by Guangdong Early Education Association in November 2014 said only 10 percent of the teachers recruited by early childhood education centers in the province have teaching certificates. "It's hard to know which teachers who are dedicated to the industry, as China has no qualifying certificate for early education teachers," Yuan Ailing, an early childhood education expert told South Weekly.

Western countries tend to strictly regulate their teachers of early education. In the US, the minimum requirement is a bachelor's degree and no less than six months of working experience, Jeremy Moretti, an American studying infant and child psychology told Information Times.

Modern Express interviewed a woman surnamed Zhang, who identified herself as the head of an early education center in Nanjing. Since assuming her role, she has never been inspected by a government official. "In this industry, everything depends on the company's social responsibility," Zhang said.

Unfortunately, many are reckless money seekers.

Last December, Xinhua News Agency reported how Yibaobei, an early education institute in Beijing, closed suddenly after spiriting away the tens of millions yuan in tuition fees it collected from 400 families.

Last September, China Business reported an employee at Beijing Jiahezi Culture Company tricked the mother of a one-year-old baby to apply for the company's membership card, priced several thousand yuan, without telling her that the card can only be used by children more than 2 1/2 years old.

Similar cases have occurred nationwide. Cities like Shanghai, Xi'an, Hangzhou, Wuhu in Anhui province and Changchun were all found to have early childhood education centers that closed after founders absconded with the money.

#### Chinese-Style Ed

Setting the deficiency of governmental supervision and the disorder within the industry aside, experts have deep concerns over the misleading early education principles in China.

Surveys found that 70 percent of Chinese families confuse early care and education with knowledge gaining. In order to appeal to parents, who have unrealistic ambitions for their children, domestic companies are creating courses to teach preschool children practical knowledge in English and math. One even opened MBA courses for babies, said Chen Lei, a Shanghai CPPCC member.

Germany, the first country to offer early education schools, does not have specific regulations nor institutions for preschool children under the age of 3. The government's only recommendation is a general intelligence development plan, said Hans-Gunther Robach, an early education professor at Otto-Friedrich-Universitat Bamberg.

"A large-scale educational plan launched by the State, for example, aims to cultivate the language ability of two-year-old children, and is conducted not through training or reciting but through children's interactions with their parents in their daily life and activities," Robach said.

According to International Herald Tribune, in Germany, it has become a family tradition that parents stay at home to accompany and educate children younger than three years old.

-reprinted from Beijing Today

**Region:** International <sup>[3]</sup>

**Tags:** quality <sup>[4]</sup>

regulation <sup>[5]</sup>

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