

# What is Preschool Education

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**Abstract:** Questioning the origin is not only a logical exploration of reason, but also the need of practical activities. Preschool education is not only education, but also has implications beyond education. As an institutionalized pre-school education practice institution, kindergarten can provide pre-school education, but it can not be directly equivalent to pre-school education. The real pre-school education is the educational practice based on the physical and mental development characteristics of children. It is not a simple knowledge transfer. The essence of pre-school education is to “combine education with education”. As a form of human social practice, preschool education aims to be based on children’s nature, committed to children’s enlightenment and enlightenment, and make children adults.

**Keywords:** education; Preschool education; kindergarten; Enlightenment and enlightenment; Children and adults

At present, with the emergence of diversified pre-school education practice institutions and market-oriented pre-school education value orientation, the traditional intellectual boundary is constantly broken. How to view the relationship between education and pre-school education, how to examine the differences and links between kindergarten and pre-school education, how to see the status and role of “care” and “games” in pre-school education, and how to understand the nature and function of pre-school education, It is the key for us to answer what is preschool education or what is real preschool education.

## 1. Education and preschool education

Preschool education system is a subsystem of education, and education must include preschool education. Children generally go through four stages of education: preschool education, primary education, secondary education, and higher education. Accordingly, it can be understood that preschool education is a period of education for children. In order to better understand what preschool education is, the relationship between education and preschool education needs to be clarified. There are many similarities between education and preschool education, but the differences are fundamental. From the point of view of logical appropriateness, it is believed that preschool education is subordinate to education, but it cannot be understood as pure subordination. The preschool education system, especially the “preschool” part, obviously goes beyond the traditional practice boundary of education. Up to now, the age division of education in western society is also influenced by the age division of education by ancient Greeks. The first is preschool, which lasts until about 7 years old. Before the age of 7, children are taught by their mothers. Games and fables are the main teaching materials; the second is the beginning of formal school education, which extends to adolescence to a certain extent. On this basis, the last is various kinds of education after adolescence. As time goes on, it is divided into secondary education and higher education.

The intersection of preschool education and education can be understood from the continuity of children’s development. Although they are aimed at the development of children, preschool education and education require different conditions and their respective roles. Preschool education in practice must be understood beyond the two categories of “teaching and learning”. Preschool education relies not only on “education” to achieve children’s development, but also on “nature”, “games”, “leisure” and “life”. If we only start from the perspective of “education”, we can never understand the meaning of preschool education by simply emphasizing the shaping role of education. As an important symbol of the development of modern society, the importance of preschool education has gone beyond the traditional education category.

## 2. Preschool education and kindergarten

The confused cognition of preschool education concept is also related to the continuous emergence of diversified practice institutions outside the traditional kindergartens. Therefore, how to view the relationship between kindergarten and preschool education becomes another important dimension to understand what is preschool education. As mentioned above, the term ‘preschool education’ does not always exist. In September 1903, China established the first official kindergarten - Hubei Wuchang Kindergarten, marking the beginning of China’s pre-school public education system. In fact, the idea of establishing schools for young children was first proposed by Comenius. He proposed the establishment of a maternal education school. In such a school integrated with families, special attention should be paid to providing children with food, sleep, fresh air and sports, so that a sound mind can live in a healthy body. In 1837, Froebel founded the organization of “developing children’s activity instinct and self activity” in Brangenburg and named it “Kindergarten”. Thus, in the last decades of the 19th century, people saw the development of Kindergarten as a practical institution of preschool education. However, due to the lack of funds for purchasing kindergarten equipment and the ratio of children to teachers not meeting the requirements, the development of kindergartens was restricted in the whole 19th century. Therefore, the laws of some countries only recognize public schools or primary schools and do not include kindergartens, thus hindering the development of kindergartens. In fact, from the perspective of the whole development history of preschool education in the 19th century, since kindergarten is the mainstream institutional form of preschool education, people are more willing to use the word “kindergarten” to express it. Although the concept of preschool education was born, it has not been popularized. At least in Europe, “kindergarten” is still a more widely accepted term than “preschool education”. In the 20th century, with the pursuit of efficiency and the great strides of the industrial revolution, the demand for “non parental care” in the world has increased. It has become a

trend to establish more children's education institutions and let more children receive 'preschool education' in institutions. For example, the nursery school was born under such a background. The American nursery school enrolls children of pre kindergarten age, ranging from 18 months old to 4 years old. The plan and content of the care school are similar to the kindergarten plan, but the age is at a lower stage. Not only that, it is a major feature of the care school to pay more attention to the physical and mental health of children. With the diversified appearance of pre-school education practice institutions, the concept of kindergarten alone cannot be used to refer to all relevant institutions. Therefore, whether in the daily discourse system or in the national policy text, the term "preschool education" has gradually replaced the concept of "kindergarten" and has become increasingly dominant.

Today, the term "preschool education" has long been known by the public. However, within the preschool education system, it is necessary to carefully examine what is preschool education. Because the kindergarten in the form of traditional practice institutions has long been rooted in the hearts of the public, but the real practical nature of preschool education is often ignored by the public. For a long time, preschool education has been regarded as the natural downward extension of primary education. It has naturally become a part of "education" and lacks the characteristics of "preschool". Even preschool education is roughly understood as "education". In order to survive in the fierce competition, many preschool education institutions also hide their true mission to meet the needs of parents, the market and society, distorting the difference between "protection", "teaching" and "single skill training" in the value system, and many early childhood training institutions even attribute single skill training to "preschool education". Therefore, many current pre-school education practice institutions are not worthy of the name. On the one hand, due to the traditional understanding of school education, it is believed that teaching and knowledge acquisition are the main practical path of preschool education; On the other hand, although under the urging of the concept of "preschool", we have a certain understanding of "games" and "experiences", we lack effective operations on how to realize the value of games and trigger children's life experiences. The result is that it returns to the old way of knowledge teaching in traditional school education.

As we all know, the kindergarten born more than 100 years ago is the origin of modern preschool education. As the main institution for preschool education, the values of kindergartens have a profound impact on the development of preschool education. Froebel, the "father of kindergarten", clearly pointed out when naming his own preschool education institution: "It is different from the similar institution usually called 'kindergarten'. The kindergarten is not a school, and the children in it are not educatees, but developers. "Preschool" refers to the period of learning, the form of learning, and the degree of systematization of knowledge. Its purpose is to realize "education" of "preschool". "Preschool" in "preschool education" means transcending the established "educational tradition". The essential purpose of preschool education is based on the nature of children, committed to enlightenment and cultivation. Therefore, the essence of preschool education can be summarized as happiness, understanding and respect, education care, physical and mental health, growth and development, habit formation, mental enlightenment, and appropriate environment.

In addition, kindergartens are only one form of pre-school education institutions, and kindergartens can not be directly equivalent to pre-school education. Kindergartens can provide "pre-school education". In fact, preschool education is a macro system, and individual development, national quality improvement, and employment liberation are important components of its functions. Therefore, some researchers pointed out that preschool education is of great significance to the development of education, the happiness of families and the stability and progress of society. In 1843, Froebel clearly pointed out in his Report on German Kindergarten that kindergartens accept children aged 3-6 years before school age, promote the development of children's physical and mental abilities by family methods, and form good habits. Therefore, kindergartens are only for children aged 3-6 years. The same word pattern as "preschool education" is used to refer to the education of children aged 0-3 years. Its meaning should be distinguished from "pre kindergarten (pre kindergarten) preparation education". If we artificially equate preschool education with kindergarten, we will narrow the concept of preschool education, which will lead to the separation of preschool education and preschool education at the age of 0-3.

As a concept, it has multiple usages. In practice, kindergartens often refer to the same thing as preschool education, and kindergartens should not be understood as a subordinate concept of preschool education. To be exact, kindergartens are the most common and important pre-school education institutions. All activities carried out by kindergartens are an indispensable part of pre-school education. Theoretically, preschool education has nothing to do with any institutional form that practices it. However, from the perspective of practical institutions, kindergarten and preschool education have the same meaning. It can also be understood that kindergartens are the birthplace of modern pre-school education concepts, and no other institution in the world can replace kindergartens in providing pre-school education.

In a word, kindergarten and preschool education should be understood dialectically and flexibly. People subconsciously "know" what kindergarten is, but there is no necessary explanation for the confirmation of the concept of "preschool education". The lack of reflection on the basic concepts of preschool education is not only reflected in the policy decision-making department, but also reflected in the group of preschool education researchers. As a result, people either equate preschool education with general education and use the theory of general education to guide the practice of preschool education. Or we can equate preschool education with specific forms of kindergarten practice institutions, and use kindergarten practice ideas to guide the whole preschool education practice. Therefore, preschool education and kindergarten are not two different concepts, but two different levels of concepts. Preschool education is generally divided into pre-school family education, pre-school institutional education and pre-school social education. Kindergarten is the main practice institution of current pre-school education, and pre-school education is the practice content, activity and result of kindergarten. To understand what preschool education is, we need to separate from the "narrow concept" of current preschool education, face the preschool education itself, and fully consider the integrity of the concept of preschool education, the particularity of the system, and the complexity of practice.

### 3. Understanding preschool education

Children's education has always existed. In the period of non formal education, the form of children's education is different from that of formal education institutions (such as schools). Under the control of informal forces, every young child will inevitably get some education from the life process. However, throughout the history of education, especially shortly after the emergence of kindergartens, the puzzling problems of preschool education also arose. For example, at what age should children enter kindergarten? Are all children or only some children admitted to the kindergarten? How long should children study in kindergarten? What is their purpose in entering the park? What will they learn? What is the name of the place where they enter? From here, we can find that, in fact, preschool education is constructed by society. From the beginning, they have no fixed characteristics, no necessary standards, and no necessary goals. It is not obvious what their significance, role, and purpose are. How we view preschool education determines what preschool education does, what activities and functions it has. With the popularization of pre-school education and the diversification of pre-school education practice institutions, people pay attention to what is the real pre-school education. The distinction between preschool education and real preschool education reflects people's expectations for preschool education.

The current generalization of the concept of preschool education has an important relationship with the public acceptance of preschool education, which also reflects the diversity of preschool education supply and the diversity of preschool education practice. We lack a deep understanding of the unique situation that preschool education is facing, and we also lack a consensus on what is real preschool education. We can understand preschool education from four dimensions: institution, activity, content and result. As an institution, preschool education mainly refers to the organization system mainly consisting of kindergartens and nurseries. As an activity, preschool education emphasizes the importance of promoting children's growth. However, looking at the current preschool education activities, it is mainly realized through the component of "teaching", and even regarded as the core task. Preschool education as content means that the materials children rely on for learning are experience, activity and relationship, not just text and knowledge. Preschool education provides space for activities, materials and relationships to make children's growth possible. As a result, preschool education always pays attention to what kind of people to cultivate, especially to prepare for entrance education.

In a word, in today's rapid development of pre-school education, the judgment that as long as you enter kindergartens or other pre-school education practice institutions, you are equal to receiving pre-school education is fundamentally wrong. Entering pre-school educational institutions and receiving pre-school education are not simply equivalent. Here, 'pre-school education' refers to the educational practice based on the physical and mental development characteristics of children, and is not a simple knowledge transfer. The essence of it is to "combine education with education". If not, kindergartens will also be institutions that wear the mask of "preschool education" and train zero grade students. From this point of view, a child receiving pre-school education cannot be simply regarded as a person receiving 'education', nor can the pre-school education stage be simply understood as the reserve stage of primary schools. As a form of human social practice, pre-school education aims to devote itself to the enlightenment and enlightenment of children based on their nature, so that children can become adults.

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