

Marketization of Early Childhood Education in China: Effects and Strategies for Organizational Leaders

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ABSTRACT

The education sector in China has been subject to market forces due to the sustained growth of the Chinese economy. Education marketization is a phenomenon that involves the commodification of education services and their subsequent exchange on the market. The phenomenon of education marketization has been attributed to various factors, including economic system reform, shortage of education resources, diversified social demands, and education system reform. In recent years, Chinese government has increased its investment in public schools and has concurrently fostered and endorsed the growth of private educational institutions. This initiative aims to enhance the quality and scope of educational services, cater to the diverse requirements of parents and students, and further stimulate the advancement of education marketization. The trend in question has had an impact on Early Childhood Education (ECE), which is a significant component of the educational system. Although education marketization has helped to improve the single and limited nature of kindergarten services, it has also brought some problems. This essay aims to investigate the effects of marketization in education on early childhood education (ECE) and proposes strategies that ECE organisational leaders can adopt to address the challenges posed by marketization while maintaining educational standards in Chinese society.

Keywords: *The marketization of education, Management and leadership in early childhood education, Kindergarten education.*

1. INTRODUCTION: BACKGROUND

Song and Li (2018) claim that the phenomenon of education marketization can be attributed to the advancement of the market economy and the advocacy for education reform. It optimizes resource allocation, forms prices, competes in quality, and improves efficiency through market mechanisms. The concept of education marketization is a novel approach to attaining educational resource allocation and service provision through applying market prices, voluntary transactions, and competitive mechanisms (Zhu & Li, 2006).

The rise of education marketization is the result of the interaction of multiple factors, such as economic system reform, shortage of education resources, diversified social demands, and education system reform (Liu & Chen, 2004). Since

the 1980s, China has made significant progress in economic system reform and gradually realized the transformation to a market economy. The aforementioned transformation has not only brought about a significant alteration in the conventional planned economy system but has also had a profound impact on the education sector.

Before 2000, education resources in China were generally scarce, particularly in the country's central cities, where there was a severe lack of open seats in public schools. Some private educational institutions started to appear in response to parents' demands for high-quality educational resources, and the trend of education marketization grew over time. With the development of the social economy and the improvement of knowledge levels, people's demand for education services has become increasingly diversified. Some parents hope their children can receive traditional subject education,

while others focus more on quality education, art education, etc. The marketization of education has been aided by this diverse demand

China has been undergoing a deepening reform of its educational system recently. The government has increased investment in public schools, improved the supply of education resources, and encouraged and supported the development of private education institutions, promoting the prosperity of the education market. These measures aim to improve the quality and coverage of education services, meet the needs of different parents and students, and promote the development of education marketization.

The above analysis shows that education marketization is a complex social phenomenon has a significant impact on education development and is closely related to a number of different societal spheres, including the economy, politics, and society. To better identify development directions and solutions, research on education marketization must take into account the interaction of various factors.

2. IMPACT OF EDUCATION MARKETIZATION ON ECE

The current unequal distribution of educational resources is the first effect. Economic growth, education spending, and the distribution of educational resources vary significantly across regions. Economically developed regions have higher levels of economic development, more government education investment, and relatively abundant education resources, while underdeveloped regions are relatively lacking in education resources. Education marketization may lead to uneven distribution of education resources, especially in underdeveloped areas (Yang & Wang, 2019). Due to the effects of market mechanisms, education resources may be more concentrated in wealthy areas or areas rich in education resources, neglecting the needs of some impoverished areas or families. As a result, the phenomenon of unequal distribution of educational resources may be made worse by education marketization.

Secondly, education marketization can promote the diversification and personalization of education services, thereby improving the quality and efficiency of the early childhood education industry (Yang & Wang, 2019). Early childhood education facilities (primarily private kindergartens) constantly raise the standard of their instruction to

encourage parental spending and gain a foothold in the market. In accordance with the requirements of parents and children, they also offer a variety of services, such as classes and nursery. Early childhood education can become more competitive in the educational market as a result of the ongoing professionalisation and diversification of services.

The growth in the number and size of early childhood education institutions is the third important effect. Due to market demand and competitive pressures, more and more early childhood education institutions are entering the market, providing different education services. The growth of the early childhood education sector and an improvement in its general quality can both be facilitated by the number and size of these institutions (Zhang et al., 2020).

However, under the influence of education marketization, more and more institutions are lowering their enrollment standards and expanding their enrollment numbers to increase their profits (Yuen & Ho, 2007). This phenomenon is also evident in the domain of early childhood education. To achieve profitability, kindergartens rapidly increase enrollment, with up to 50 children in a single class, greatly increasing the workload of early childhood teachers and lowering their job satisfaction. Furthermore, a considerable number of kindergartens opt to decrease the remuneration of educators specialising in early childhood education as a cost-cutting measure. The aforementioned phenomenon not only results in a reduction in the standard of education but also renders numerous proficient and highly educated instructors unemployable in the domain of early childhood education. Over time, this phenomenon is likely to result in a reduction of the overall educational standards within the early childhood education sector. Neither of these factors is conducive to the industry's long-term development.

Simultaneously, education marketization has also led to the proliferation of formalism in education organizations, especially in the early childhood education industry. While education marketization has promoted the development of kindergartens to some extent, it has also led to the problem of formalism in kindergartens. The competitive mechanism under education marketization often leads kindergartens to excessively emphasize superficial forms, such as pursuing high-end decoration, introducing famous teachers, and increasing the number of courses, while ignoring the essence and actual effects of

education. As a result of the proliferation of parental demands and their elevated standards for educational excellence, certain kindergartens have implemented additional formalised curricula and instructional practices to meet these expectations. However, this approach has resulted in an unwieldy educational experience that lacks practical application, ultimately fostering a culture that prioritises test-taking and performance over the unique developmental needs of each child.

3. SUGGESTIONS

Given the current trend of marketization in education, what strategies can early childhood education institutions employ to maintain their viability while simultaneously upholding the standards of educational excellence? The trend of education marketization is both an opportunity and a challenge for early childhood education organizations. To ensure the quality of education while navigating the trend of marketization in the education sector, early childhood education institutions may wish to consider the following factors:

3.1 Specializing Teachers and Rationalizing the School Structure

Educators serve as the fundamental building blocks of early childhood educational institutions. It is recommended that kindergartens make rational decisions regarding the allocation of teaching resources. This should be based on various factors such as the size of the kindergarten, the quality of teaching, and the developmental needs of the students. Simultaneously, it is imperative for kindergartens to prioritise the distribution of educators across various age groups and subject domains. It is recommended that a continuous effort be made to introduce novel teaching concepts and methodologies to educators, foster self-enhancement among kindergarten teachers, and attain the objective of establishing a proficient team of teachers. Notwithstanding marketization, it is imperative that the calibre of educational materials is not compromised.

3.2 Building Brands and Stabilizing Market Orientation

The brand of an early childhood education organisation is considered to be a fundamental aspect of its competitive advantage. It is recommended that kindergartens prioritise brand

development by focusing on bolstering brand recognition and reputation, as well as cultivating a positive brand image. Brand building can be strengthened through advertising, social media promotion, and word-of-mouth marketing. By determining brand positioning, designing brand logos, building brand image, and establishing brand culture, early childhood education organizations can increase consumer recognition and favorability, thereby enhancing brand value and market competitiveness. Organisations involved in early childhood education ought to establish pricing strategies that align with market demand and competitive forces. Additionally, they should offer fee structures that cater to families from diverse economic backgrounds while prioritising the value and quality of educational services to guarantee the contentment of both parents and students.

3.3 Establishing Effective Home-School Cooperation

Collaboration between homes and schools is a crucial factor in facilitating the sustainability and advancement of early childhood education institutions. It is imperative for early childhood education institutions to prioritise the establishment of effective home-school relationships. This can be achieved through bolstering communication and interaction with parents, gaining insight into the needs of both parents and students, providing prompt feedback on students' academic progress, fostering trust and satisfaction among parents and students, and ultimately enhancing the market competitiveness of early childhood education organisations.

In summary, to survive in the trend of education marketization while ensuring the quality of education, early childhood education organizations need to focus on improving the quality of education, strengthening brand building, continuous innovation, establishing good home-school relationships, and setting reasonable prices. Simultaneously, it is imperative for early childhood education establishments to remain cognizant of market dynamics and competitive forces, and to adroitly modify their strategies and tactics in response to evolving market demands and fluctuations.

4. CONCLUSION

Education marketization is the result of the development of the market economy and the

promotion of education reform, which optimizes resource allocation, forms prices, promotes quality competition, and improves efficiency through market mechanisms. Education marketization is a complex social phenomenon that requires a comprehensive consideration of the interaction of different factors.

The multifaceted effects of marketization of education on the early childhood education sector are noteworthy. On the one hand, it may exacerbate the uneven distribution of education resources, especially in underdeveloped areas. On the other hand, it can promote the diversification and personalization of early childhood education services, and improve the quality and efficiency of the early childhood education industry. In addition, education marketization may also lead to an increase in the number and scale of early childhood education institutions. However, under education marketization, in order to expand profits, some early childhood education institutions may lower enrollment standards and teacher salaries, thereby reducing the quality of education. At the same time, education marketization may also lead to the problem of formalism, which emphasizes superficial forms of early childhood education, while neglecting the essence and practical effects of education. Hence, the marketization of education necessitates prioritising the equitable allocation of educational resources and fostering a varied and superior standard of educational provisions, all while ensuring the sustainability of the market.

For early childhood education organizations, the trend of education marketization is both an opportunity and a challenge. In order to survive in the trend of education marketization while ensuring the quality of education, early childhood education organizations should focus on improving the level of teaching staff, strengthening brand building, continuous innovation, establishing good home-school relationships, and setting reasonable prices. Simultaneously, it is imperative for them to remain vigilant towards market fluctuations and competitive forces, and adroitly modify their strategies and tactics to align with the evolving market demands. Enhancing market competitiveness is imperative for early childhood education organisations to attain sustainable development and distinguish themselves in the market competition.

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