

CRISIS MANAGEMENT OF PRIVATE KINDERGARTENS IN CHINA UNDER COVID-19 EPIDEMIC SITUATION

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Abstract: *Since the outbreak of COVID-19, private kindergartens in China have encountered a crisis of survival and development. Whether private kindergartens can successfully overcome difficulties is related to the development goal of preschool education and more children's enrollment needs could be met in the future. In order to realize the sustainable development of private kindergartens, literature review and interview are adopted in this paper to analyze the practical difficulties faced by private kindergartens during the epidemic. The following suggestions are proposed from the perspective of kindergarten internal management: kindergarten principals should assume the responsibility of management, adopt a variety of ways to reduce the turnover rate of kindergarten teachers, and establish the crisis management system in response to outbreaks.*

Keywords: *COVID-19 virus, Manager, Internal management, Public interest kindergarten.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Since the outbreak of COVID-19, China has taken a series of prevention and control measures such as quarantine, extension of holidays, suspension of in-house catering and tourism, and online teaching to avoid large-scale population movement and aggregation, thereby controlling the development of the domestic epidemic in a relatively short time. As a country with a large population, China has achieved such a significant stage victory in the fight against the epidemic that other countries in the world began to learn from the “China experience”. However, there is no denying that the COVID-19 epidemic has caused a noticeable impact on the development of economic and social in China, as well as people's daily life (Zhang, 2020, p. 26), especially brought severe survival and development crisis to private kindergartens. There are 266,677 preschool education institutions in China, among which 165,779 are private kindergartens, accounting for 62.16% of the total (CHNNBS, 2019). In the nearly four months since the outbreak, private kindergartens have no source of income because of suspension. If the kindergartens can be reopened in mid-May, it will also face the problems of refunding part of tuition fees to parents and the possible loss of teachers and children. It is customary for kindergartens to have summer vacations in early July, which will lead to the income of these private kindergartens may be zero again. That is to say, private kindergartens are expected to have a seven-month income freeze period this year due to the particularity of its industry. Whether private kindergartens can successfully overcome the difficulties is not only related to the interests of the founders of kindergartens, but also related to the realization of the goal of reaching 80% coverage rate of public interest kindergartens in China by 2020 and the possibility of more children's enrollment in the future (Yang, 2020, p. 3).

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On April 15 this year, the general office of the Ministry of Education in China (2020) issued a notice on the support work for private kindergartens throughout the country during the epidemic, requiring all regions to regard relief of difficulties for private kindergartens as an urgent task at present and formulate phased support policies for them. Many education administrations have supported private kindergartens through policies such as reduction and subsidy of education fees, issuance of awards and subsidies for public interest kindergartens, free distribution of epidemic prevention materials and tax incentives. In fact, in order to achieve sustainable development, private kindergartens should not only rely on the help from the government, but also strengthen their internal management to improve their ability to prevent and control crises. However, previous research mainly focused on the external aspect of private kindergartens, for example, the policy support from the government, and there is basically limited research on the internal emergency management of private kindergartens. To bridge this gap, this paper focuses on how to improve the internal emergency management based on the analysis of the dilemma faced by private kindergartens, so as to improve the sustainable development of private kindergartens.

2. METHODOLOGY

In this study, literature review and interview were mainly adopted. Literatures was mainly selected by referring to the articles indexed in CNKI, WoS, Scopus, Google Scholar and CQVIP based on the following keywords: “COVID-19”, “private kindergartens”, “managers” and “management system”. The policies, regulations, documents and related data are conducted through the official websites and newspapers of the Chinese government. Due to the epidemic situation, the interview is mainly carried out in the online form with a total of 6 teachers and principals of private kindergartens in different levels on the basis of the interview outline prepared in advance.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

With the outbreak of covid-19, private kindergartens that had lost their main source of income were hit hard due to school suspensions. To be able to successfully overcome the difficulties, the managers of private kindergartens will face multiple challenges.

3.1 Operation of private kindergartens

The plight of private gardens during the epidemic has attracted widespread attention. A survey of 280 private kindergartens showed that more than 60% of them were unable to maintain normal operations and 19% were seeking to transfer due to a shortage of funds (Luo, 2020, p. 2). As early as February 28 this year, a research from Preschool Education Committee of the Chinese Association for Non-Government Education pointed out that the epidemic brought great challenges to the operation and even survival of private parks, especially public interest private kindergartens, and there is a greater risk of out-of-school children. It is recommended that the government should provide rent subsidies, and encourage financial institutions to provide small loans to private kindergartens in the form of government discounts and low interest rates to alleviate the financial difficulties.

In the case of COVID-19 epidemic crisis, private kindergartens need to rely on their own management in addition to policy support and other external forces to achieve their sustainable development. In particular, kindergarten principals must take the responsibility of management. The Professional Standards for Kindergarten Principals published by the Ministry of Education

of China (2015) clearly clarifies the roles of kindergarten principals as managers, leaders and educators, each of which has corresponding tasks and professional responsibilities. By comparing the relevant professional standards or occupations of kindergarten principals in China, the United States, New Zealand and Canada, it is found that both the roles of managers and leaders are emphasized, and the comprehensive and specific professional responsibilities and performance of kindergarten principals are highlighted (Suo, 2019, p. 46), as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. The role orientation of kindergarten principals
in professional standards of four countries

Country	Role orientation of kindergarten principals		
China	manager	leader	educator
United States	manager	leader	--
New Zealand	manager	leader	educator
Canada	manager	leader	educator

It is necessary for kindergarten principals to take the initiative to take their responsibilities, especially the kindergarten emergency management after the epidemic. The principals need to organize the preparations for the start of the kindergarten in advance, including personnel arrangements, system construction, parent work and so on. Before children officially enter the kindergarten, teachers should be organized to establish a connection with every parent. For example, a series of parent-child education courses on the online platform could be provided for parents who are still hesitant to choose a kindergarten to keep abreast of the situation of the children and guarantee a smooth transition before official arrival. Such distance education methods could not only achieve “suspension of classes but not stop learning and no delay in education”, but also can make the parents still choose to let their children continue to stay in the original kindergarten and ensure that the source of students is not lost. Also, it can also ensure the basic income of kindergarten education fees, which is helpful to maintain the basic operation of kindergarten during the outbreak.

3.2 Turnover of preschool teachers

Before the epidemic outbreak, previous research showed that the flow of kindergarten teachers is significantly higher than that of teachers in other education stages, and unbalanced flow phenomenon with a liquidity period of less than 5 years and a flow rate of more than 10% gradually becomes more prominent (Yue & Liu, 2013, p. 53). Moreover, the research on the kindergarten teacher turnover in central China showed that the frequent turnover of kindergarten teachers presented a certain regularity, that is, the turnover rate of teachers in private kindergartens is much higher compared with public kindergartens (Cai, 2011, p. 7). To grasp the impact of the epidemic on the profession of preschool teachers, 3 different types of private kindergarten teachers was conducted an online interview to after the epidemic outbreak. Two of these respondents reported that they had switched careers because that their kindergarten had not been paid during the epidemic, and they either did not have enough deposits to pay for daily living expenses. Another respondent got the basic salary from the kindergarten, but the amount is not adequate to maintain the elementary needs in their daily life. She is on the fence about whether to change her career although she loves the education career. In fact, the turnover rate of kindergarten teachers is aggravated on the original basis affected by the epidemic situation.

Figure 1 shows that both the number of staff and full-time teachers in private kindergartens account for a significant proportion in the whole preschool education system (CHNNBS, 2019). Therefore, the increasing turnover rate of teachers of private kindergartens during the epidemic will have a great impact on the development of preschool education in China. Most private kindergartens may face the problem that the number of teachers is insufficient when children come back to the kindergartens. For private kindergartens, although the loss of some teachers could reduce some expenses, it was bound to bring difficulties to the future education and teaching activities. The kindergarten principals should ensure that the existing capital chain is not interrupted because that the private kindergarten needs to be responsible for its own profits and losses, which is not only the economic lifeline of the kindergarten, but also an important guarantee for the payment of the salaries of the current teachers.

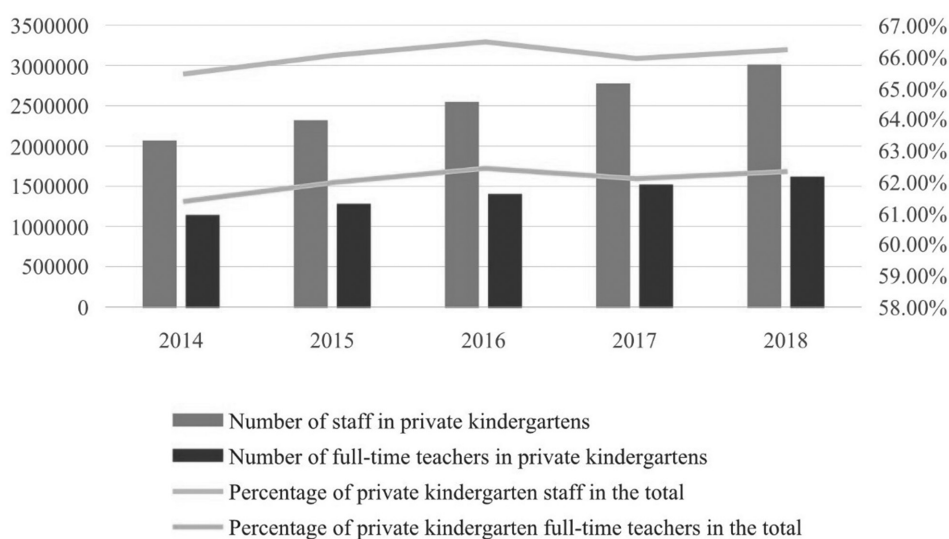


Figure 1. Situation of staff and full-time teachers in private kindergartens

Kindergarten principals should adopt a variety of ways to reduce the turnover rate of kindergarten teachers. On the one hand, the principal could organize the teachers to establish an “online companion community for children” during the epidemic, and parents can join the group voluntarily and only need to pay a small fee. Special teachers should be arranged to share parent-child game videos suitable for preprimary children in the group, and answer parents’ parenting questions at a fixed time every day. In this way, it not only could enable preschool teachers earn more than their salary during the epidemic, but also stimulate their sense of mission and motivation for achievement with parents’ participation and trust, and make them more enthusiastic about their current positions. Besides, the various awards and subsidies provided by the government in response to the epidemic could be reasonably used to provide basic living subsidies for teachers, so as to guarantee their basic living to reduce the turnover rate. On the other hand, since preschool teachers need to do more work after the kindergartens officially reopen, kindergarten principal could take necessary welfare plans to increase teachers’ professional happiness and stabilize the teaching team. It has been reported that 71% of the surveyed employees could be influenced by their welfare plan on their decision of whether to resign or not (10 Robbins & Coulter, 2017, p. 329). Because the epidemic has not been completely controlled, the following welfare plans can be adopted in kindergartens to avoid cross-infection and meet the safety needs of teachers, for example, kindergarten teachers could have free meals in the kindergartens and receive free daily epidemic prevention materials such as thermometers and masks.

3.3. Internal emergency management mechanism

Although the support policies for the epidemic issued by the Ministry of Education and other local governments could properly alleviate the survival problems of private kindergartens, effective internal management system is fundamental to achieve private kindergartens' sustainable development. Online interviews were conducted with 3 principals of private kindergartens at different levels. All of them reported that there is a lack of emergency management mechanism for unforeseen circumstances such as outbreak of COVID-19. It is of great significance to establish the internal emergency management mechanism to realize the sustainable development of private kindergartens on the basis of ensuring survival.

Therefore, the kindergarten should establish a management system for epidemic response before the official reopening. As the first person responsible for the prevention and control of the epidemic in the kindergarten, the principal is fully responsible for the organization, leadership, responsibility decomposition, task implementation and supervision and inspection of the epidemic prevention and control in the kindergarten, which is the requirement of China's Ministry of Education (2020) for all principals of both the public and private kindergartens (p.12). Firstly, the kindergarten principals should organize the establishment of the kindergarten epidemic prevention command leading group to complete the work plan and system construction during the epidemic prevention and control, as shown in Figure 2. Specifically speaking, it is necessary to formulate emergency plans and conduct relevant exercises to ensure that relevant personnel clearly understand the procedures and responsibilities before children enter the kindergarten. Additionally, there is a need to develop and refine the work specifications for children care and disease prevention, as well as the health care specifications in the one-day kindergarten process. Kindergarten rules should be open and transparent to children's parents to win their trust. After the formation of a virtuous cycle, it can be ensured that children could insist on going to the kindergarten every day without being absent.

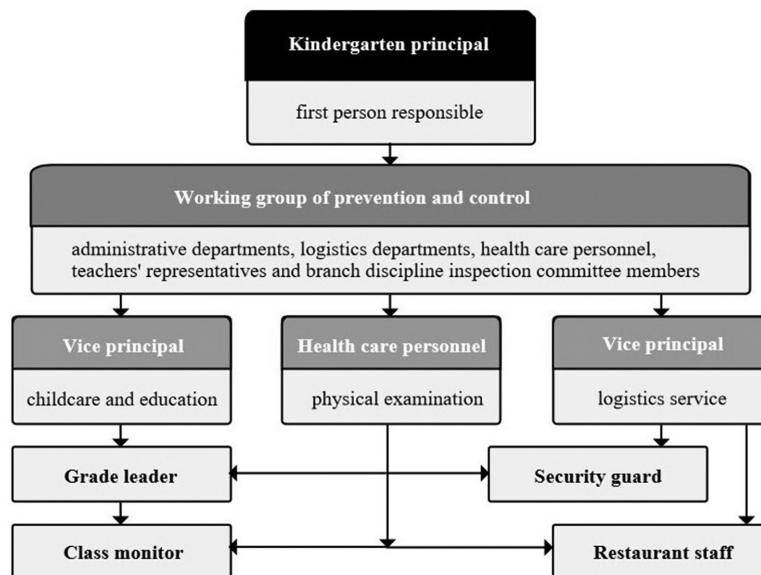


Figure 2. Structure of epidemic prevention command leading group in kindergarten

Secondly, kindergarten principals should implement various prevention and control measures according to the requirements of local government, and make on-duty arrangements to ensure the health and life safety of children and teacher. Also, the principals of the kindergartens shall timely launch the emergency plan for prevention and control of the sudden epidemic in the kin-

dergarten according to the specific conditions after the kindergarten reopens. The first lesson for children should be elaborately arranged for a stable transition and large collective activities should be avoided. Finally, it is necessary to organize specially-assigned personnel to take charge of the psychological adjustment of kindergarten staff after the epidemic, similarly, kindergarten teachers should actively pay attention to the mental health of children and their parents, both of which are very important but also easy to be ignored by the manager.

4. CONCLUSION

Since the global outbreak of COVID-19, the sustainable development of private kindergartens in China has been greatly impacted. Based on literature review and individual interviews, this study argues that private kindergartens are confronted with the many difficulties such as the risk of closure or transfer in operation, the increasing turnover rate of preschool teachers, and the general lack of emergency management mechanism in kindergartens. In view of this, we suggest that kindergarten principals should take the responsibility of management, adopt a variety of ways to reduce the turnover rate of kindergarten teachers, and timely establishment of crisis management mechanism in response to the epidemic.

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