

# The Real Dilemma and Cracking Path of the Supply-Side Reform of Voluntary Universal Prekindergarten in Guangdong Province

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**How to cite this paper:** Liang, K., & Lu, C. G. (2023). The Real Dilemma and Cracking Path of the Supply-Side Reform of Voluntary Universal Prekindergarten in Guangdong Province. *Creative Education*, 14, 741-751.

<https://doi.org/10.4236/ce.2023.144049>

**Received:** March 29, 2023

**Accepted:** April 23, 2023

**Published:** April 26, 2023

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## Abstract

In view of the characteristics of the development of voluntary universal prekindergarten in Guangdong Province at this stage, we analyze and refine the development of voluntary universal prekindergarten from 2010 to 2021 based on the supply-side reform perspective in terms of preschool education supply main body, financial supply, teacher supply and institutional supply respectively, and find that there are problems such as imbalance in the structure of supply main body, weak awareness of government main body, insufficient structural supply of funds, lack of stable Based on this, we propose to ensure the supply attributes, improve the system to guarantee the supply system, increase the supply motivation, improve the mechanism to guarantee the supply of funds, optimize the supply efficiency, improve the quality of the supply of teachers, improve the supply mechanism, and increase the supervision and accountability.

## Keywords

Voluntary Universal Prekindergarten, Supply-Side Reform, Realistic Dilemma, Cracking Path

## 1. Introduction

At the end of 2021, Guangdong Province's GDP had reached 12 trillion yuan, and it was the veritable number one economic province in China for 33 consecutive years, leading the country in economic and social development and other fields. However, the education sector has not been able to keep pace with economic and social development, as reflected by the fact that there is still a gap between the universal pre-school education and the quality of education and

care in developed regions such as North, Shanghai and Suzhou. Insufficient supply of voluntary universal prekindergarten resources (especially public preschool education resources) is the bottleneck that restricts the development of the education sector, especially preschool education, in Guangdong Province at present. In view of the public goods attribute of preschool education, the development of preschool education is the duty of the government. This paper will explore the real dilemma of the supply side of voluntary universal prekindergarten from the supply situation of preschool education in Guangdong Province, and analyze the supply side and demand side of voluntary universal prekindergarten in Guangdong Province from the perspective of the government's responsibility, in order to explore the path to crack the supply-side reform.

## **2. Basic Situation of the Development of Voluntary Universal Prekindergarten in Guangdong Province**

In 2010, the National Medium and Long-term Education Reform and Development Plan (2010-2020) and the Opinions of the State Council on the Current Development of Preschool Education were introduced, and the public welfare and inclusive attributes of preschool education were determined for the first time in a national document, with the main responsibility of the government returning again and the construction of an voluntary universal prekindergarten public service system becoming a clear policy orientation. The State Council in 2011 asked governments at all levels to prepare and implement a three-year action plan for preschool education on a county (district) basis, and in 2018, for the first time since the founding of the country, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council issued a number of opinions on the deepening reform and standardized development of preschool education. By 2020, the proportion of children in public kindergartens will reach more than 50%, and the proportion of children in inclusive kindergartens will reach more than 80%. The development of voluntary universal prekindergarten has shown the distinctive features of "increasingly significant government power and gradual return of equity and justice". And data show that at the end of 2018, the gross enrollment rate of preschool education in Guangdong Province reached 112.46%, 17.77% higher than in 2013. There were 18,953 kindergartens, 5160 more than in 2013, an increase of 37.41%. The total number of children in kindergarten reached 4,491,100, an increase of 945,400 over 2013, or 26.66%. The number of kindergarten staff reached 549,900, up 213,200 from 2013, an increase of 63.34%, and the ratio of students to staff increased from 9.49:1 in 2013 to 8.17:1. The number of full-time kindergarten teachers reached 292,900, up 104,700 from 2013, an increase of 55.62%. The number of children in public kindergartens reached 1,360,600, and the number of children in inclusive private kindergartens reached 2,045,000, with the number of children in public kindergartens reaching 30.29% and the number of children in inclusive kindergartens reaching 75.83%.

After three phases of the preschool education action plan, by the end of 2020

there were 20,747 kindergartens in Guangdong Province, 1794 more than in 2018, an increase of 9.46%; the total number of children in kindergartens reached 4,810,700, 319,600 more than in 2018, an increase of 7.11%; the number of public kindergartens reached 7123, the number of children in public kindergartens reached 2,481,200, and The number of children in private voluntary universal prekindergarten reached 2,089,200, and the number of children in public kindergartens reached 51.58%, an increase of 21.32 percentage points over 2018; the number of children in voluntary universal prekindergarten reached 86.70%, an increase of 10.87 percentage points over 2018, successfully achieving the “5080” The goal is to achieve “5080”. Although the development of preschool education in Guangdong Province has been rapid in recent years, due to the late start of the development of voluntary universal prekindergarten, a thin base, many debts, a weak foundation, a large number of children, the school system to be improved, coupled with the “two-child wave” overlap (Liang & Xu, 2021) population continues to inflow, the demand side of the boom on the supply side of the huge pressure, resulting in the distance from the supply side is under tremendous pressure due to the high demand, which leads to a long way to achieve a balanced supply of voluntary universal prekindergarten. In view of this, compared with developed regions such as Beijing, Shanghai, Jiangsu and Zhejiang, the supply-side reform of voluntary universal prekindergarten is still the biggest shortcoming in the supply-side reform of education in Guangdong Province, and faces many practical difficulties.

### **3. The Real Dilemma of Supply-Side Reform of Voluntary Universal Prekindergarten in Guangdong Province**

Since the development of voluntary universal prekindergarten in Guangdong Province started late, has a thin foundation, owes a lot, and has a weak foundation, this paper will focus on the supply-side reform, analyze and refine the development of voluntary universal prekindergarten between 2010 and 2021 from several major aspects, such as the main supply of preschool education, financial supply, teacher supply, and institutional supply, and focus on the new stage and new characteristics of the development of voluntary universal prekindergarten in Guangdong Province after the promulgation of the “Ten National Articles on Preschool Education”. It focuses on the new stage and new characteristics of the development of voluntary universal prekindergarten in Guangdong Province after the promulgation of “National Article 10” of preschool education, and provides solutions for the supply-side reform of voluntary universal prekindergarten.

1) Imbalance in the structure of the main body of supply, the government’s main awareness is not strong

Although a series of policies and regulations for the development of voluntary universal prekindergarten have been introduced in Guangdong Province in recent years, which have led to new changes in the structure of the main supply body of voluntary universal prekindergarten, the proportion of private kinder-

gartens in the total number of kindergartens in Guangdong Province has been expanding year by year for a long period of time, showing a gradual increase from 2001 to 2011 and a fluctuating decrease afterwards. This indicates that the proportion of public kindergartens and other major kindergartens is expanding, and the structure of the main supply body tends to be optimized. Although the number of public kindergartens has been increasing since 2010, from 2513 to 5955 in 2020, the total number of kindergartens has increased from 11,161 to 20,747, and the growth rate of public kindergartens is not significantly higher than the total number of kindergartens. This has greatly weakened the public goods attribute of voluntary universal prekindergarten in Guangdong Province, resulting in a short supply of high-quality public kindergartens with high public recognition and low prices, which has not effectively alleviated the livelihood issues of the public such as “difficult to enter kindergarten” and “expensive to enter kindergarten”. Therefore, at this stage, the main structure of the supply of voluntary universal prekindergarten in Guangdong Province is still dominated by private kindergartens and supplemented by public kindergartens, and there is still an imbalance in the overall ratio.

#### 2) Insufficient structural supply of funds and lack of stable input mechanism

Although in recent years, the financial investment in preschool education in Guangdong Province increased from 1.101 billion yuan in 2010 to 12.510 billion yuan in 2019, an increase of more than 10 times, although the average per capita financial investment in preschool education in Guangdong Province will be 9521.44 yuan by 2020, an increase of 57.65% compared with 6039.55 yuan in the previous year, the average per capita financial investment in compulsory education (primary and secondary schools) Education funding investment, on the other hand, were 21,708.59 yuan, an increase of 2.95% and 14,654.73 yuan, an increase of 0.09%. The intensity of financial investment in preschool education compared with the compulsory education section, although a significant increase, but due to the low starting point, small base, thin base, the total number of far for other school sections.

On the whole, although the total amount of investment in preschool education is increasing year by year, the proportion of financial investment in preschool education is still relatively small compared with that in compulsory education, high school education and higher education, resulting in a significant shortage in the total supply, in order to meet the needs of suitable children enrolled in school in Guangdong Province at this stage and promote the high-quality development of voluntary universal prekindergarten (Jiang & Pang, 2019). In addition to the shortage of total financial investment in preschool education, there are also problems such as unbalanced structural distribution, including regional and urban-rural imbalance and over-concentration of investment direction with large differences. For example, in 2020, the average financial investment in preschool education in Guangzhou is RMB 13,907.47 per student, while that in Zhanjiang and Shantou is RMB 2627.14 and 3636.49, respectively. There is a large gap between regional and urban-rural financial in-

vestment in preschool education, and the direction of investment is more concentrated in a few public kindergartens in cities and towns (centers), such as demonstration or first-class kindergartens at various levels. The large number of private kindergartens in rural areas and poor areas and the large number of private kindergartens have difficulty in obtaining sufficient funding, and the shortage of this source of funding depends on charging children's education fees, which leads to expensive fees for private kindergartens, and thus the problem of insufficient structural supply of preschool education funding.

The unreasonable structure of investment in preschool education is also reflected in the direction of investment favoring the hardware construction of inclusive resources, such as campus buildings and book provision. Although the national target of more than 80% coverage of inclusive kindergartens has been reached by 2020, the proportion of public kindergartens is still low (including the purchase of public preschool resources), and the limited financial investment in inclusive private kindergartens is still difficult to change, plus the already limited financial investment is not spent on improving the quality of inclusive kindergartens and improving teachers' salaries, resulting in inclusive private schools being higher in fees than public schools, but far inferior in quality to local public schools. This makes it difficult to give full play to the advantages of inclusive private kindergartens and to achieve high-quality development of preschool education, which deviates from the original purpose of vigorously developing inclusive kindergartens.

### 3) Large gap in total teacher supply and imbalance in regional and urban-rural development

As the country's largest province in terms of population inflow, Guangdong Province has increased its emphasis on preschool education in recent years, and nationwide, if the standard of 30 students per class in kindergarten is followed, each class should be equipped with 2 - 3 full-time teachers, i.e., the standard student-teacher ratio should be 10:1 - 15:1. The ratio of students to teachers in preschool education is 18:1, which is far from the standard of 1:15 set by the Ministry of Education (Yin, 2021). Specifically in Guangdong Province, by 2020, there will be 4,810,700 kindergarten children, 611,300 teaching staff, including 321,500 full-time teachers, and the ratio of children to full-time teachers will be 14.96, basically reaching the target of 1:15, but there is still a great imbalance between regions. The number of kindergarten children in Guangzhou is 574,541, 41,019 full-time teachers, with a student-teacher ratio of 15.17, while Shantou and Zhanjiang have 212,323, 17,071 and 186,056, 4883 respectively, with a student-teacher ratio of 12.43 and 38.10. It can be seen that at this stage, the total supply of full-time teachers for preschool education is still insufficient to meet the actual demand, and there is still a large gap in the supply of teachers, and the regional imbalance is obvious.

### 4) The system supply is not perfect and lacks authoritative legal support

In the past decade or so, several policy documents have been issued at the national level to promote the development of voluntary universal prekindergarten,

such as “Several Opinions of the State Council on the Current Development of Preschool Education,” “Guidelines for Learning and Development of Children Aged 3 - 6,” “Regulations for Kindergarten Teachers,” “Opinions of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council on the Deepening Reform and Standardized Development of Preschool Education,” etc. Most of these documents are aimed at the macro development of preschool education. These documents mostly focus on the macro development of preschool education, but do not clarify specific regulatory responsibilities, government duties and other related issues, and the institutional attributes of voluntary universal prekindergarten and the regulatory system lack legal protection and still need to be improved. At the legal level, China has introduced special laws in the field of education, such as the Education Law, Compulsory Education Law, Vocational Education Law, Higher Education Law, and Private Education Promotion Law, to regulate and protect, but only the lack of a special Preschool Education Law, preschool education legislation is obviously lagging behind in the process of legalization in China. Although a number of relevant opinions have been issued, its value status and real effectiveness cannot be compared with the real law (Yin, 2021). Preschool education is the basic link of the national basic education system, and preschool education legislation is an important part of improving China’s education legal system; therefore, the high-quality development of voluntary universal prekindergarten urgently needs institutional legal protection. And so does Guangdong Province. According to the national legislative plan of the Preschool Education Law, Guangdong Province has launched the legislative plan of Guangdong Preschool Education Regulations to cooperate with the national introduction of preschool education laws and regulations to ensure the development of voluntary universal prekindergarten around the country according to local conditions.

#### **4. The Cracking Path of Supply-Side Reform of Voluntary Universal Prekindergarten in Guangdong Province**

1) To ensure the supply of properties, improve the system to protect the supply system

a) Speed up the legislation of preschool education and clarify the attributes of preschool education for the public good and universal benefit.

Research shows that preschool education is the foundation and beginning of national education, and the investment in children of the right age at this stage will have great economic and social benefits in adulthood (Barnett, 1993). Therefore, the enactment of the Preschool Education Law is the key to the development of high-quality education by guaranteeing the public welfare and inclusive attributes of preschool education from the fundamental system, while making up for the long-absent special laws on preschool education in independent school segments, and guiding and regulating the development direction of preschool education. Only by speeding up preschool education legislation can we truly guarantee funding and supervision and management, reverse the in-

adequate and unbalanced development of voluntary universal prekindergarten from the system, alleviate the shortage of preschool education resources, especially the insufficient supply of quality preschool education resources, and guarantee its sustainable and healthy development. According to the Preschool Education Law, the Guangdong Preschool Education Regulations should be introduced as soon as possible, in which the division of responsibilities among governments at all levels, the mechanism for investment and use of funds, planning, resource layout, allocation of kindergarten teachers and supervision mechanism should be further clarified, so as to clearly define the nature and basic status of preschool education for public welfare and inclusion in the form of laws and regulations. In addition, education equity should be highlighted in the formulation of local policies, with appropriate tilts to poor areas such as rural areas and old revolutionary regions, and the implementation of a basic free education guarantee system for disadvantaged groups, etc. Only by addressing key issues in the form of laws and regulations can governments at all levels have laws to follow and laws to comply with when carrying out preschool education activities.

b) Clarify the responsibility of the main supply body, increase the structural optimization of the main supply body.

In the policies at all levels, it is clear that the government is the main body responsible for the development of voluntary universal prekindergarten, continue to implement the “General Office of the Guangdong Provincial People’s Government on increasing the supply of kindergarten and primary and secondary school places and quality education resources,” “Guangdong Province to strengthen the construction and management of kindergartens in residential areas,” “Guangdong Province, inclusive private kindergarten identification, support and management measures,” “Guangdong Province, supporting kindergartens in urban areas kindergarten governance program” “Guangdong Province on deepening the comprehensive reform of education to promote the implementation of high-quality development of basic education” and other important documents on the development of preschool education series, continue to carry out urban district supporting kindergarten governance, new neighborhoods should be equipped with kindergartens, increase the structural optimization of the main supply body, encourage social forces, third parties to run inclusive kindergartens, and gradually improve voluntary universal prekindergarten. The proportion of school places will be gradually increased, and the goal of “5080” will be consolidated.

2) Increase the supply power and improve the funding supply guarantee mechanism

a) Increase the financial input and optimize the financial input mechanism.

The quality of voluntary universal prekindergarten relies heavily on sustainable financial investment, and the lack of sufficient financial investment is the most important reason for the unbalanced and insufficient development of voluntary universal prekindergarten in Guangdong Province, therefore, the financial investment should be increased and the financial investment mechanism

should be optimized. First of all, we should increase the financial investment, hold the red line of 4% of education expenditure and expand the ratio year by year. The financial investment in preschool education should be tilted to voluntary universal prekindergarten, especially to the rural areas, ethnic areas, old revolutionary areas and other “three states and three regions”. Secondly, each local government should introduce relevant policies to ensure stable growth of per pupil financial allocation, clarify the standard quota of public funding, determine reasonable fees and cost-sharing mechanism. Finally, multiple channels should be used to raise funds for development, not only to ensure public finance, but also to encourage private capital and social funds to invest in the voluntary universal prekindergarten market in an orderly manner. Continuously and steadily increasing financial investment in voluntary universal prekindergarten can help promote the equalization of public services in preschool education, and more importantly, promote voluntary universal prekindergarten from equal opportunity to quality equity.

b) Adjust the financial input structure and improve the cost-sharing mechanism.

The problem of unbalanced and insufficient development of voluntary universal prekindergarten among regions, urban and rural areas, schools and groups is largely due to the less than reasonable structure of financial investment and the lack of a sound cost-sharing mechanism. The development of voluntary universal prekindergarten should not only increase the financial investment, but also improve the efficiency of the use of funds and optimize the financial investment structure. First of all, we should focus on the funding for voluntary universal prekindergarten resources (such as public and inclusive kindergartens), facilities, teachers’ treatment and hardware and software facilities, dig deeper and cultivate reasonably priced and high-quality preschool education resources according to local conditions, make efforts to improve the quality of supply, ensure the dedicated use of funds and maximize the efficiency of funding; secondly, we should improve the preschool education funding system and make efforts to build a Secondly, we should improve the pre-school education subsidy system, and strive to build a cost-sharing mechanism of “government-society-family-school” to ensure the balanced and high-quality development of inclusive pre-school education resources.

3) Optimize the supply efficiency and improve the quality of teacher supply

Although preschool education in Guangdong Province has developed rapidly in recent years, there are still many problems in teacher supply such as insufficient total supply, poor structural quality of education, low overall treatment, unstable teacher team, and unsound training mechanism, which seriously restrict the quality of early childhood teacher supply and hinder the high-quality development of voluntary universal prekindergarten. Therefore, optimizing the supply efficiency and improving the quality of teacher supply is the only way to promote the high-quality development of voluntary universal prekindergarten.

a) Expand the scale of teacher supply and improve the quality of structural



supply (Zhang & Bu, 2021).

The current student-teacher ratio of voluntary universal prekindergarten in Guangdong Province shows that there is still a large gap in the number of early childhood teachers, coupled with the impact of the “comprehensive two-child” policy, the total number and scale of preschool teacher supply is still unable to meet the actual demand, and the academic structure is low, especially the number of quality teachers is still difficult to meet the strong demand of the people. Therefore, according to the actual situation, multiple channels and measures should be taken to continuously expand the scale of enrollment of publicly funded teacher training students, rural orientation programs, transfer of surplus teachers in primary and secondary schools, and special post programs to expand the scale of supply of inclusive preschool teachers, so as to reserve sufficient teacher strength for the development of preschool education. In addition, optimize the educational structure of teachers, improve the proportion of undergraduate and above early childhood teachers, and improve the training system of professional teachers in preschool education. At present, in the context of the great vigorous development of vocational education, the government should focus on improving the structural supply quality of early childhood teachers’ academic qualifications, on the one hand, supporting the development of vocational colleges and universities such as early childhood teacher training colleges, expanding the scale of training teachers with specialist and bachelor’s degrees, and improving the quality of supplying teachers with high academic qualifications; on the other hand, running undergraduate teacher training colleges and universities with preschool education-related majors, improving the professional recognition and practice of teachers with bachelor’s and master’s degrees. On the other hand, we should also run undergraduate teacher training colleges and universities to enhance the professional recognition and enthusiasm of teachers with bachelor’s and master’s degrees, create favorable conditions to encourage, support and guide teachers with higher degrees to join the teaching practice of voluntary universal prekindergarten, improve the professionalism of teachers and promote the high-quality development of teachers.

b) Sound treatment guarantee mechanism to optimize the structure of teacher training.

The government should strengthen supervision and urge localities to earnestly implement various salary policies that effectively protect early childhood teachers, increase financial subsidies for non-staff teachers’ salaries, and rural kindergartens can appropriately increase subsistence subsidies for early childhood teachers according to actual conditions. The introduction of public kindergarten staffing standards, explore the implementation of the total number of staff control record management, and timely replenishment of public kindergarten staff, effectively cracking the long-standing establishment difficulties. In addition, increase the training of principals and key teachers, starting with teacher ethics, professional and career development, to enhance the professionalism of teacher development, ensure the stability of the teaching force, and create favorable

conditions for its long-term development. Adhere to and improve the open recruitment system and access system for early childhood teachers, strictly control the entrance barrier, fully implement the relevant provisions such as licensed induction, and effectively ensure the quality of teachers.

4) To improve the supply mechanism and increase regulatory accountability

Effectively perform public service functions and assume the main responsibility for the development of preschool education. First, should give full play to regulatory responsibilities, increase supervision, governance “without a license to run a garden” phenomenon, improve and strictly implement the approval system, strengthen access management, and resolutely put an end to irregularities in running a garden; secondly, the conditions of running a garden, safety and health, quality of teaching and learning, and the management and use of funds to carry out comprehensive supervision, relevant information in a timely manner to the public. Finally, to strengthen the governance of the community supporting the garden and other related work, found that the rectification of ineffective places to timely accountability, to ensure that the rectification tasks to implement, multi-channel expansion of voluntary universal prekindergarten supply.

Therefore, based on the theory of supply-side reform, from the aspects of voluntary universal prekindergarten supply main body, financial supply, teacher supply and institutional supply, this paper proposes to ensure the attribute of supply, improve the system to guarantee the supply system, increase the supply power, improve the fund supply guarantee mechanism, optimize the supply efficiency, improve the quality of teacher supply, improve the supply mechanism, and increase the regulatory accountability. We will continue to promote the high-quality development of voluntary universal prekindergarten in Guangdong Province.

## Project

This paper is a youth project of the “13th Five-Year Plan” of Guangdong Provincial Philosophy and Social Science in 2019, “Research on the Construction of Voluntary Universal Prekindergarten Public Service System in Guangdong Province from the Perspective of Supply-side Reform” (Project No. GD19YJY04). This paper is the initial results.

## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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