



## RESEARCH REPORT

# Early Childhood Education in People's Republic of China: a Literature Review of the Publications Written in English

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	5
2. SCOPE OF THE LITERATURE REVIEW	8
3. METHODOLOGY	8
4. KEY DEFINITIONS	10
5. OVERVIEW OF THE STRUCTURE OF THE LITERATURE REVIEW	11
6. INTRODUCTION: AN OVERVIEW OF CHINESE SOCIOECONOMICAL AND EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT	12
7. EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE (ECEC) IN CHINA	18
7.1 Historical context	18
7.1.1 From 1900s to 1949: Western influences	18
7.1.2 From 1949 to 1978: Soviet Union influences	20
7.1.3 From 1978-1990s: Open Door Policy	20
8. EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE: CURRENT TRENDS	25
8.1 Urban -rural disparities, public funding and distribution of funds	28
8.2 Under developed provision for children from 0-3 years	33
8.3 A curriculum that derives from a hybrid of mainly three cultures	34
8.4 Literacy	39
8.5 Quality, assurance issues and child outcomes	42
8.5.1 Definitions of quality in the Chinese context	42
8.5.1.1 Quality in urban and rural areas	44
8.5.1.2 Study and play	45
8.5.1.3 Pedagogy and Curriculum	46
8.5.1.4 Measuring the quality of ECEC	47
8.5.1.5 Moral and ideological tensions and children's rights	48
8.6 Teacher education and professional development:	50
8.6.1 Policy context: staff and training expectations	50
8.6.2 Early Years Teacher workforce: status and conditions	51
8.6.3 Chinese National Curriculum Standards: ECEC	53
8.6.4 The context of Initial Teacher Education	53
8.6.5 In Service teachers contexts: progression and measurement	55
8.6.6 Recent Initiatives: In service training and CPD	56
8.6.7 Leadership: Policy and development	57
8.6.8 Initial teacher education	59

8.6.9	In service training and professional development .....	59
8.7	Parents.....	60
8.7.1	Family structures .....	60
8.7.2	Parenting styles .....	61
8.7.3	Parents' beliefs on play and learning .....	64
8.7.4	Parents involvement and engagement in ECEC.....	65
9.	KEY FINDINGS .....	67
9.1	Teacher education for the early years in China.....	67
9.2	Quality in early years education .....	68
9.3	Early literacy development .....	70
9.4	Family and parental education .....	70
10.	REFERENCES AND BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	72
11.	APPENDIX 1 PUBLICATIONS THAT MET SELECTION CRITERIA IN STAGE 1 OF THE LITERATURE REVIEW .....	112

# 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Early childhood education and care (ECEC) has seen dramatic and rapid changes the last three decades in China. Equally the survival, development and ECEC of children have been improved greatly. This development is imbalanced and unequal between rural and urban areas of China, however. The urban rural disparities underpin the development of ECEC in terms of quality of provision, curriculum, teacher development and parental involvement.

There are many achievements in promoting child development and education and protecting children's rights. The National Plans for Medium- and Long-term Reform and Development (2010-2020) set targets for near universal access to ECEC by 2020 and there has been a massive increase in children accessing ECEC. However, the distribution of the funding is uneven between regional areas and this has led to the privatisation of ECEC. Finally, the ECEC provision for children under 3 years is underdeveloped and key challenges are limited funding and lack of qualified teachers who have the skills to work with the age group.

China has seen a rapid socioeconomic growth in recent decades that has resulted in increased urbanisation. This growth is uneven, with many rural areas still being under poverty levels. This has posed serious social challenges, with the biggest one being the migration of rural workers to urban centres resulting to a high number of children (34.3 million NBS et al 2017) having migrated to urban areas and living in poor conditions, with housing instability or children being left behind (68.8 million, NBS et al 2017) either with grandparents or caregivers. Research has shown that these children are the most disadvantaged as they have difficulties either attending ECEC or accessing it and other public services. In the case that migrant children have access to ECEC that is typically either of low quality or illegal.

ECEC has seen an increased interest at policy level and research suggests that quality has been raised in the last two decades, but this road is not without its challenges and has left a patchy provision. Firstly, although ECEC has increased, the allocated resources were not enough and uneven distributed between rural and urban areas resulting in a widening the gap of the development of such provision. There are now many children who do not have access to basic ECEC (3-6) or are accessing low quality ECEC. Secondly urban areas have developed better ECEC as the quality and quantity of kindergartens, the enrolment rate, the number and education degree and qualifications of teachers are of higher quality than the rural areas. Thirdly, the

development of ECEC has been left to private organisations in rural areas while the public ECEC within the urban areas sponsored by the educational authorities have better quality. Finally, the curriculum is decentralised and although there are guidelines to set the standards the actual every day practice has been left to each ECEC context.

This has led to variation of practices. ECEC curriculum in China has been shaped by a hybrid of Western, Soviet Union and Chinese traditions and culture. Although a play-based approach and a play-based pedagogy are favourite and with research emerging showing the benefits of such an approach in the Chinese context, this approach has not been yet integrated fully. With the exception of some good examples, whole class teaching, teacher directed activities and modelling primary school activities in ECEC are main practices, partially because teachers training and qualifications are still underdeveloped and partially because that contradicts traditional values. Thus, research urges for a culturally appropriate and sensitive practices.

China is now promoting quality in education and has invested in campaigns to promote this idea. The idea of an autonomous, independent child as learner that is respected, has a voice and is able to participate in all aspects of life is now strongly promoted. But nevertheless, the quest to quality is hindered by the urban rural disparities, the Chinese values and traditions of discipline, obedience, respect for the elderly, a hybrid curriculum that teachers cannot always support, limited or lack of quality measurement tools for the overall ECEC quality that are culturally appropriate and moral and ideological tensions that impact on the implementation of children's rights.

There is evidence of much investment to develop high qualified teachers for ECEC and there is progress towards that direction, but still there are many challenges in terms of qualifications and status as well as professional development. Research has suggested that there are issues and challenges in pre- and in-service training and its quality. Within the context of initial teacher education, the polarisation of training routes has resulted in a shortage of well qualified ECEC specialist graduate teachers. ECEC teachers' living conditions in terms of payment and opportunity for development are low. Teachers also find sometimes the progressive ideas that are promoted difficult to implement due to their personal beliefs and values. Assessment and career progression based upon performance has led to the evaluation of ECEC teachers being more focused upon hierarchical status than aligned to the outcomes of children. School leaders have a high level of authority, with leadership practices underpinned by societal norms in

reflecting a traditional approach. This has posed challenges in developing models of distributed leadership in schools and supporting teachers in developing their own leadership capabilities outside of their classroom context.

Parental involvement and engagement in children's learning and education has increased in the last decades. The 'One Child' policy has created a new generation of children that are looked after by two parents and four grandparents. Parents tend to value educational activities and play for learning (Eduplay) more than play for leisure. However, when it comes to being involved in their children's education this is highly valued. Research suggests that from a very early age children in China are introduced to a number of activities to improve either skills that will need in later life or their academic outcomes. The time of play for fun has decreased.

To conclude, although there are significant achievements in developing ECEC in China and the commitment of the government is applaudable, there are some great challenges to be overcome and the road has been described as 'twisty'. The urban rural disparities impact on all elements of the development of ECEC and although there is an increase in academic homegrown research that is now available to English speaking world, there are many areas to still further our understanding with more research needed to inform practice. However, what practices are implemented in ECEC provision research are cautioned to be culturally appropriate and sensitive to be effective.

## 2. SCOPE OF THE LITERATURE REVIEW

The scope of this literature review was to examine current and contemporary research in the early childhood system in the People's Republic of China (China) in the English-speaking world under the following themes:

1. Quality of early childhood education (achievements and challenges);
2. Teacher's training and education;
3. Family and parental education;
4. Early literacy development.

For this purpose, we examined published work in English speaking journals and books as well as reports from World Bank, OECD, UNESCO and UNICEF. We found that there was an increase of publications in English speaking world after 1978 which, as shown below, was a seminal year as the country began to adapt an open-door policy and market oriented economic development.

This increase in publications followed with more research being accessible to English speaking journals after the year 2010 where China introduced the National Plans for Medium- and Long-Term Reform and Development (2010-2020).

## 3. METHODOLOGY

The literature review was conducted in two stages.

In the first stage a broad search was performed in the electronic catalogue of the UCL Institute of Education, which includes many on line English academic journals, with the search terms "preschool, early childhood education, early years education in China". This search produced 15,687 hits (from the start of the on-line records (1990s average per on line journal) to January 2019). An additional search was performed in the database of the Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI) using the same terms with a similar number of hits. It was decided at this initial stage to limit the filter on the research in both search engines to articles that had been published in peer review journals from January 2015 to date (January 2019). This resulted in 1,875 hits that were filtered under the following criteria:

1. Is the publication based on experimental research in China (including the two administrative regions Hong -Kong and Macao)?



2. Is the publication a systematic literature review?
3. Is the publication authored by Chinese based scholars (at least one)?
4. Is the publication referring to the education and care of children from birth to six?

A scanning of the titles and the abstracts of the articles took place and 21 publications (please see appendix 1) met the inclusion criteria for this preliminary stage of the review.

A meta-analysis was conducted to identify the key themes under the scope of this literature review. The results informed the search for publications and the structure of this literature review. The publications were coded under the key themes of the scope of the literature review. This exercise also helped us to filter the quality of the articles used.

It was found that the focus should be on impact of reforms, laws, policies, philosophy and ideology in early childhood education and care formulation, trends and implementation, quality, pedagogy and curriculum, staff training and leadership.

It was found that the Open-Door policy started in 1978 and the publication of the National Plans for Medium and Long-term Education Reform and Development (2010-2020) triggered a number of studies examining aspects of early childhood education and care such as policy, quality, interventions and curriculum that were published in English.

Thus, the second stage of the literature review was to broaden the search to cover from 2000 to current date (April 2019). The purpose of including publications from 2000 onwards was to enable us to study previous conditions and understand the changes that occurred through time.

Analysing thematically the publications in peer reviewed journals and international handbooks from 2015 to the present offers this literature review an understanding of the current situation and the key challenges and barriers that early childhood education and care might face. At this stage of the research of other related and relevant documents such as statistical data, assessment reports and press release related to early childhood education in China were reviewed from different sources including Chinese and international organisations websites that were written in English language (e.g. OECD, UNESCO, UNICEF, World Bank).

However, before we progress with the literature review it is important to offer a definition of what is meant with the term 'early childhood education and care' within the Chinese context.

## 4. KEY DEFINITIONS

Examining the available research, the terms pre-primary education, preschool education, early childhood education and care and kindergarten education are used to refer to education and care for children from 0-6 years of age.

However, Li and Chen (2017) and Wang and Ho (2018) make the distinction that the term preschool education refers to full day programmes that prepare children aged from 3-6, for primary education. Song et al (2014) clarify:

*In China, education and care for children aged 0-3 years is called 'Early Education' (zaoqijiaoyu), whereas the education and care for children aged 3-6 years is called Early Childhood Education or Preschool Education. The centers/institutes which provide education and care for young children are called 'Youeryuan'. These terms are often used in government documents. (p. 364).*

In literature before 2010 early childhood education in China refers to education that is provided to children from birth up to the age of 6. It is provided in early childhood education and care institutions classified according to the age of the children as follows: Nurseries (0-3), kindergartens (3- 6), and preschool classes (5-6) (see, for example: Corter, Janmohammed, Zhang, and Bertrand 2006, Zhu, 2009).

Common in the literature and policy documents is that in China the education of children from 0-6 is treated as basic education within the education system (e.g. Tsegay, Kansale and Goll 2017, Qi and Melhuish 2017, Pan et al 2018, Li et al 2019).

According to Chinese law, education, including early childhood education, has been identified as the responsibility of government (Zhou 2011). The Ministry of Education issued the first programme regulations entitled 'Kindergarten Provisional Operational Regulations (Initial)' in 1952 where it is stated:

*The purpose of the early childhood program is to ensure that children have a healthy physical and mental development upon entering the elementary school; meanwhile the program is to relieve the burden of child care from mothers, so mothers are able to have the time to participate in political, productive and educational activities. (Zhou 2007, p. 972)*

The reforms were later expanded to include the development of physical, intellectual, social, emotional and aesthetics. Currently, in China, early childhood education and care is placing emphasis on Early Childhood Development (ECD) and the holistic development of the child - the physical, social, emotional, cognitive thinking and language progression of each young individual (UNESCO 2018). Therefore, in this review the terms:

*“Early Childhood Education and Care”*: (hereafter referred as ECEC) is used to describe all the formal settings that host children from 0 to 6 years and are under government’s administration and subject to regulations, laws and policies.

*“Teachers”*: is used to describe all staff that are responsible to implement the curriculum in ECEC, either in the public or private sector.

*“Parents”*: is used to describe the legal guardians of the children.

*“Caregivers”*: is used to describe adults who look after children whose parents have left them under their care, either due to migration or other reasons such as parents having died and leaving them as orphans.

## 5. OVERVIEW OF THE STRUCTURE OF THE LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review is presented in nine sections. The introductory section offers an overview of the socioeconomic situation of China and the general education system. The second section offers an overview of the political historical developments in China and how they impacted of early childhood education. The remaining sessions discuss the current trends of early childhood education in terms of policy reforms, curriculum, early literacy, quality, teacher development, parental engagement and involvement. Finally, the literature review will conclude with some key findings that have emerged from the review of the available publications.

## 6. INTRODUCTION: AN OVERVIEW OF CHINESE SOCIOECONOMICAL AND EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT

After a very long history of China being ruled by a series of dynasties, 1949 saw the end of this long historical period and the People's Republic of China was founded when China entered a Communist era.

In 1966, and under the leadership of Mao Zedong, China entered a ten-year period that brought changes in politics, economics and social system which is known as Cultural Revolution. In 1972 Richard Nixon became the first US president to visit China when both countries expressed an interest to normalise their relationships. Four years later (1976) Mao died and, after a year of political unrest, Deng Xiaoping became the leader of China. Under his leadership a new period of economic and political reforms started with 1979 again establishing diplomatic relationships with the US.

Since then China started moving away from a single market economy and shifted to a mixed economy and private sector which opened the country to foreign investments. These reforms and the 'Opening Up' policy started bringing socio-political changes and phenomenal economic growth. Also, in the same year to control the growth of the population the 'One Child' policy was introduced.

Today China (official name People's Republic of China) is the most populous country with 1.385.6 million people of which 17 per cent are under the age of 14 and has an economic growth rate of 0.6 per cent per year (World Bank 2016, OECD 2019).

China is geographically the fourth largest country in the world, having 22 provinces, five autonomous regions, four direct-controlled municipalities (Beijing, Tianjin, Shanghai, and Chongqing) and the special administrative regions of Hong Kong and Macau. There are 56 ethnic groups in the nation, with the Han making up about 92 per cent of the population and other ethnic groups including the Zhuang, Uygur, Hui, Yi, Tibetan, Miao, Manchu, Mongol, Buyi, and Korean. Both ethnic languages and the official language of Mandarin are used in ethnic areas. Over half

of the population (56 per cent) lives in urban centres (World Bank 2016, World Bank Data, [http://data.worldbank.org/.](http://data.worldbank.org/))

As mentioned earlier, the introduction of the 'Open Door' policy in 1978 the country has seen improved economic growth and living standards, especially in the urban areas. China has shifted to a more market-based economy and the gross domestic product (GDP) growth has increased nearly 10 per cent. This is considered one of the fastest sustained expansion by a major economy in history. According to the World Bank (2018) more than 800 million people have been lifted out of poverty since the 1970s and 1980s. China reached all the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015 and made a major contribution to the achievement of these goals globally. However, the vast rural population downsizes the dividend for each person which, despite the impressive economic growth and China's influential role in the global economy, means the country still remains a developing country as the per capita income is still a fraction of that in advanced countries (World Bank 2018). It is estimated that there were 55 million poor in rural areas in 2015 (World Bank 2018).

The key challenges the country faces are high economic inequality, rapid urbanisation, challenges to environmental sustainability and external imbalances such as climate changes and disasters (e.g. earthquakes). China also faces demographic pressures related to an ageing population and the internal migration of labor (World Bank 2018). In order to address these challenges, China has introduced the 13th Five Year Plan (2016-2020). This plan aims to address:

*Environmental and social imbalances, setting targets to reduce pollution, to increase energy efficiency, to improve access to education and healthcare, and to expand social protection. The annual growth target in the 13<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan is 6.5 percent, reflecting the rebalancing of the economy and the focus on the quality of growth while still maintaining the objective of achieving a "moderately prosperous society" by 2020 (doubling GDP for 2010-2020)"*

(World Bank 2018, The World Bank in China:

<https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/china/overview>).

Within the available research and international reports on China it is evident that the government is making intense investments at legislative, policy and financial level to improve the life of children in the country. A series of national policies and laws exist to ensure the protection of children's right to access services in health, nutrition, education and social integration (SABRE-

ECD 2016). The education system has become among one of the key priorities of the country (KPMG 2010, He and Ho 2017, Tsegay et al 2017, Li and Chen 2017, Pan et al 2018, Yang and Li 2019).

The Chinese Communist Party has been committed to develop socialist education with emphasis on Chinese cultural values and characteristics. In addition, it has guaranteed the right to education for billions of Chinese population (SABRE-ECD 2016, Pan et al 2018, Li et al 2019), establishing the world's largest education system. A number of reforms have taken place at all levels of education in an attempt for the country to adjust to follow the fast-changing modern world and face any forthcoming challenges.

These reforms have ranged from early childhood up to tertiary education, with Chinese law making it clear that education will be the responsibility and priority of the government. The Chinese government see the development of education as a key way of building the country's capacity in terms of human resources in order to promote the citizens' overall quality of education, boost development in a scientific way and speed up socialist modernisation (Yue, Zongtang, Jing, and Chao, 2010). Therefore, in March 2008, at the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), a strategy was proposed to develop a national plan for medium and long-term education reform and development (2010-2020) (Xu, Zhang, Wu, and Zhao, 2010).

A series of consultations followed this announcement and eleven thematic panels were formed to start drafting the plan under direct instructions and guidelines from the government. There were nearly 2000 people involved, including 500 scholars and experts. The first draft of the plan was made public and received over 14,000 responses and more than 2.1 million proposals were received. A further second draft was made again public for discussion and 27,885 comments were received. The publications of these drafts demonstrated the commitment of the government to transparency and for public discussions to develop a national plan that would be inclusive and effective.

Further consultations and discussion panels took place and eventually in July 2010 China announced the outline of China's 'National Plan for Medium- and Long-term Education Reform Development'. The central aim in the plan is that education is "*prioritizing development, educating people, reform and innovation, promoting equality, and improving quality*". The plan

sets a series of concrete goals, including universalising pre-school education, improving nine years of compulsory education, raising the senior high school gross enrolment rate to 90 per cent and increasing the higher education gross enrolment rate to 40 per cent. The plan pledges a substantial increase in educational funding, promising to raise the proportion of national fiscal education expenditure, increasing it to 4 per cent of total GDP by 2012 and to ensure the steady growth of this proportion in the future (Xu, Zhang, Wu, and Zhao, 2010). However, critics emphasised that the plan lacks detailed indicators for rural-urban levels, teacher-children ratio and for children with special needs education (Tsegay et al 2017, Li and Chen 2017, Pan et al 2018).

Currently in China (including both special administrative regions of Hong Kong and Macao) compulsory education lasts 9 years from 6 to age 14 and is free for all children. The levels of education are:

- Pre-primary (3-5 years)
- Primary (6-11 years)
- Secondary (12-17 years)
- Tertiary (18-22 years) (source: UNESCO UIS, 2019).

In the most recent OECD (2018) international report on the education system of China it was found:

*Educational attainment is balanced between the genders at all levels of education in the People's Republic of China. However, China has the largest proportion of 25-34 year-olds without upper secondary education across OECD and partner countries.*

*Vocational education is popular compared to other OECD and partner countries. In China, short-cycle tertiary programmes account for the largest share of all enrolled students, and the proportion is higher than the OECD average.*

*At tertiary level, international movements of students in and out of China have been growing fast compared to other OECD and partner countries. Between 2013 and 2016, the numbers of Chinese students studying abroad and foreign students in China increased by 22% and 43% respectively.*

*Pre-primary education is largely provided by private institutions in China: 54% of children*

*enrolled in pre-primary education attend private institutions, compared to 32% on average across OECD countries.*

Relevant research and international reports conclude that at policy level China is showing a serious commitment to free access to compulsory education services for primary and junior secondary education. This commitment has been extended to the children with special needs (Hao and Layton 2018). The government has stipulated that all persons with disabilities should have the rights equal to citizens without disabilities in regards to education. However, education for children with severe developmental disabilities, especially Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), is still the greatest challenge in the field (Huang and Wheeler 2007; Huang, Jia, and Wheeler 2013). Expectations of academic success for students with ASD are similar to typically developing peers: these children receive little or no related services and accommodations (Huang et al. 2013). In earlier studies it was found that children in China who are considered moderate- to low- functioning ASD are excluded typically from the mainstream education (Clark and Zhou 2005, McLoughlin, Zhou, and Clark 2005) due to lack of trained professionals to address the educational needs. Instead, these children either stay at home, receiving little educational support, or they attend a special school/centre that serves only children with ASD. The academic performance of these children, especially in the areas of reading, writing, and math, is unknown (Layton et al 2015, Hao and Layton 2018)

To sum up, due to the diverse geographic landscape, diverse cultures, diverse economic and social developments (rural -urban divide) and the diverse population of over 1.38 billion the quality of education across China varies and despite the achievements, still faces many challenges.

One of the key challenges that is flagged by UNICEF (2019) and many Chinese researchers (e.g. Chan and Zhang 1999, Du, park and Wang 2005, Liang and Chen 2007, Chen et al 2009, Hu, Kejaian and Roberts 2014, Zhao, Yu, Wang and Glauden 2014, Wang, Luo, Zhang and Rozelle 2017) is the urban-rural divide. It has been found that in rural areas headteachers and teachers lack effective training and essential resources that might have an impact on the wellbeing among certain students, especially the ones from minority communities and children affected by migration.



In a study in 2014 Song et al found that: “Because of the household registration system 1 in China, rural migrant workers are still marginalised and discriminated against. When children migrate to the cities with their parents, they may have only very limited access to quality education in their chosen urban area, while children who stay in a rural district can be separated from their parents for years on end.” (356).

Secondly, urbanisation has been affecting millions of children in China and is impacting in the quality of education (UNICEF, 2017):

*According to recent estimates, 133 million children, or 51 per cent of China’s child population, live in urban areas. Add to this the dimension of children “left-behind”, a well-known phenomenon in China referring to children who live in their original domicile, but do not live together with their parents, as either one or both parents have migrated. Of the approximately 69 million children left-behind in 2015, the 41 million children left-behind in rural areas have typically been the area of policy focus. A notable trend, though, is the growing number of children left-behind in urban areas. This reached 28 million in 2015 and is expected to continue to increase in the coming years. (p. 3).*

Initiatives such as Child Friendly City Initiative (CFCI) attempts to provide for these children and their education, but such attempts have not expanded to all urban cities with urbanisation remaining a key challenge for quality in education.

Furthermore, in a 2017 annual report on China by UNICEF (2017) another major challenge was addressed: climate change. Due to climate change, severe floods have affected millions of people across China. For example, Jiangxi Province was hard hit, with over 3.21 million people affected, 380,000 evacuated and another 256,000 rescued in the first wave of the floods. Many schools and health care facilities were damaged or destroyed, leaving a vast number of children without a school.

China’s commitment to wellbeing of children is also illustrated in the investment in early childhood education and care. However, compared to other levels of education, such as primary and secondary education, although early childhood education and care has seen rapid improvements across the country it is still not part of the universal education system with “*with patchy provision and childcare services (0-3 years) which are less adequate*” (Qi and Melhuish 2017, p. 268) and mainly rely on private organisations, as will be shown in the following sections.

# 7. EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE (ECEC) IN CHINA

ECEC in China has a long history since the early 1900s. The political changes in China brought several changes, leaving it as a confluence of diverse and varied ideals as well as practices. Before discussing the current situation, it is important to briefly offer a historical development of ECEC which impacts on the provision today.

## 7.1 Historical context

This section will be unfolding under the periods of political changes and the influences on the educational reforms.

### 7.1.1 From 1900s to 1949: Western influences

ECEC was first introduced in China when the first kindergarten was established in 1903 in Wuhan, the capital of the Hubei Province (Qi and Melhuish 2017, Li and Chen 2017, Li et al 2016, Li 2009, Zhu and Zhang 2008, Zhu and Wang 2005, Tang and Feng 2003). The leading personnel (school principals and teachers) and the curriculum was imported from Japan. This trend of importing personnel, initiatives and curriculum from other countries continued for many years.

In the early 1900s all attempts towards building ECEC were influenced either by Japan, US or other Western ideals (such as John Dewey, Fredrich Froebel and Maria Montessori). For example, the first modern Statute of Charter Schools, which proclaimed the Rules of Meng Yang Yuan and Family Education, was closely modelled after Japan's Early Childhood Care and Education and Kindergarten Facilities (Li, 2009; Zhu and Wang, 2005). There was also a move towards establishment of church kindergartens to promote Christianity and Catholicism, mainly by Western missionaries (Li and Chen 2017). The kindergartens modelled a western approach to early childhood education, following religious curriculum educational materials and teaching methods.

In 1919 the introduction of 'May Fourth Movement' (or 'New Culture' movement) reform advocated the rejection of traditional Chinese culture and a shift towards western ideals of 'Mr Science' and 'Mr Democracy'. This movement towards western ideas impacted in the ECEC in the 1920s and 1930s with reforms modelled to western ECEC. For example, in 1922, during the rule of the Northern Warlords (1912-1927), the educational authorities established the 'Ren-xu School

System', which was modelled on the US '6 (elementary) + 3 (junior high school) +3 (high school)' education system and a US-influenced kindergarten curriculum was widely adopted and became popularised in China (Li, 2009, Zhu, 2015).

These borrowed ideals and practices were reflected in the first "Kindergarten Curriculum Standards" (revised in 1936) that were introduced by the Ministry of Education of the Republic of China in 1932 and subsequently adopted by most kindergartens throughout China during the 1930s and 1940s.

However, these ideals were not always culturally appropriate as the trend was to either borrow or adopt too much from the West (Zhu and Zhang 2008, Zhu 2015). This started to change when two pioneers (Chen He-qin and Zhang Zong-lin) established the Gulou Kindergarten in Nanjing. This developed and piloted localised and culturally appropriate curriculum, embedding ideas of the educational ideology of John Dewey promoting a democratic, child centred and play based pedagogy for children (Li and Chen 2017).

In a systematic review aiming to examine the evolution of ECEC in China, Li and Chen (2017) explain that since the ECEC started in China western ideas were the main influence. Chen and Zhang started to change this trend, however, and introduced "a unit based integrated curriculum".

*Central to this curriculum was the recognition that young children's learning experiences, daily life and activities were valuable sources of learning. This approach thus transformed ECE from the traditional model of an adult-centred, classroom-centred and unauthentic learning experience into a more democratic model of a child-centred, play-centred and life-centred learning experience. Essentially, the new curriculum required a paradigm shift away from adult-centred to child-centred, whereby the active role in the teaching and learning process shifted from the adult to the child. (Li and Chen 2017, p.1473).*

This was the first attempt to develop a culturally appropriate curriculum and became influential as it was included in the Kindergartens' Curriculum Standards issued by the educational authorities in 1932 and subsequently adopted by most kindergartens throughout China during the 1930s and 1940s (Li and Chen 2017, Qi and Melhuish 2017). In sum, between the 1920s and 1940s, China witnessed the emergence of a curriculum model that embraced the first innovations of a Chinese ECC (Li, 2009; Zhu, 2015) and ideas from the West. However, this was to change with the political changes in China.

### 7.1.2 From 1949 to 1978: Soviet Union influences

After 1949, when the People's Republic of China was founded due to the change to political system and the movement of China to a socialist state, more rapid changes and reforms were introduced. The shift from either Japanese, US or other Western ideals was now towards the Soviet Union, the socialist partner of China at the time. During this period “the school system, curriculum and pedagogy were simply transplanted from the Soviet Union into China without considering their sociocultural appropriateness” (Li and Chen 2017, p. 1473). China, under the socialists and in an attempt to eliminate any non-socialists ideals, moved away from influences from US or religious kindergartens and other western ideals, such as Montessori, and adopted a subject based curriculum imported from the Soviet Union (Wang & Mao, 1996). As a result, in 1952, the Ministry of Education issued the Interim Regulation on Kindergarten (1952a) and the Provisional Regulation on Kindergarten Curriculum (1952b), that introduced a subject based teaching and a teacher centred pedagogy (Li 2009). The teaching syllabi comprised six learning subjects: (1) physical education, (2) language, (3) arts, (4) music, (5) maths and (6) environmental learning.

In parallel with the political changes in China, the reforms in ECEC were reflecting the ethos and ideals of each political movement. The period between 1966-1976 (The Cultural Revolution years) have been described as the dark ages for ECEC (Zhu 2015, Zhua and Zhang 2008, Li and Chen 2017). During these years, ECEC suffered as kindergartens were closed and any developments were suspended as educators were sent to rural and remote areas for “re-education” through labour. (Li, 2009).

### 7.1.3 From 1978-1990s: Open Door Policy

However, all of this changed with the end of the Cultural Revolution and the introduction of the Open Door policy in 1978. New reforms and policies, as well as emphasis on ECEC curriculum, again became a key priority for the government. In introducing a reformed curriculum, and in the spirit of an open door policy, the government placed emphasis on knowledge, skills, talent and creativity, seeking to reconstruct society through educational reform (Zhou, 2015, Wu 2011).

In 1979, the Ministry of Education issued guidelines on kindergarten education (draft), keeping the subject based curriculum and not returning to the culturally appropriate “unit based integrated curriculum”, first introduced in the 1950s, adding two more subjects to original six. The subjects were: (1) daily hygiene, (2) moral education, (3) physical education, (4) language, (5) arts, (6) music,

(7) maths and (8) general studies. In 1982 the national textbooks for the curriculum were introduced that instructed teachers to adopt the subject based approach. This became important as emphasis on again formalising ECEC was evident (Zhu and Zhang, 2008, Yan 2009, Wu 2011, Li 2013). Critics caution, however, that ECEC was similar now to primary and secondary education as kindergarten teachers were encouraged to deliver the subjects in a teacher driven way, rather than a more play-based and child-centred approach that flourished in the early 1900s.

Further economic reforms from 1980 onwards showed more changes in ECEC, with the subject based curriculum adopted by the Soviet Union in the 1950s being no longer relevant and the Chinese government once again examining western systems and ideals, especially those from the United States (Zhou, 2015, Li et al., 2011; Liu and Feng, 2005). Within the spirit of the Open Door policy western theories on child development and ECEC systems started reappearing in the wave of reforms that started from 1989, with the National Education Commission issuing Regulations on Kindergarten Education Practice - Trial Version. During the 1990s more reforms were introduced that aimed to provide guidance and instruction as a result of teachers not being able to implement these ideas in practice (Qi and Melhuish, 2017 Li and Chen 2027). These were further extended and, in 2001, the Ministry of Education released the supplementary Guidelines for Kindergarten Education Practice - Trial Version. These two policy documents jointly advocated the implementation of ECE ideologies and practices that aspired to ‘*face the world, face the future, and face modernisation*’ (Zhu and Zhang, 2008, p. 174). In their post hoc review, the ECE reform leaders Liu and Feng (2005), stated that this wave of curriculum reform was ‘an ideas revolution’, promoting successfully five major ideas: (1) respecting children, (2) engaging children in active learning, (3) teaching for individual learning needs, (4) emphasising play-based teaching and learning and (5) teaching and learning through daily life in kindergartens. In a critical review, Zhu and Zhang (2008) summarised the five major goals of the curriculum reform as follows: (1) highly valuing child-initiated activity; (2) paying attention to individual differences; (3) providing play as a basic activity; (4) promoting an integrated curriculum and (5) emphasising the process of learning and activity. Unfortunately, these goals were not consistent with the traditional values advocated by Confucius (see section 8.3), which emphasise collectivist-oriented goals, such as conformity and child discipline, as well as teacher training and practices that were more traditional (Li et al., 2011). However, “*these documents clarified the role of preschool education as the bedrock of the education system with aims of caring for and educating children to prepare them for primary school. They also placed responsibility for implementation at the provincial, regional and local levels*” (Qi

and Melhuish 2017, p. 270). The table below summarises the reforms that took place since 1990s to present:

Table 1. lists of major laws, regulations and guidelines relevant to early childhood education and care in China.

Year	Law, regulation or guideline	Highlights and comments
1932	Kindergarten Curriculum standards	First formal curriculum
1952	Kindergarten Provisional Guidelines' (Trial draft)	Soviet Union influences
1981	Guidelines for Kindergarten Education (Trial draft)	Guidelines on curriculum
1989	Kindergarten Work regulations (Trial)	legal basis for operating kindergarten services
1989	regulations on the Management of Kindergartens	Principles of operations of Kindergartens
1991	The law on Protection of Minors	Law
1996	Kindergarten Work regulations	replace the 1989 regulations
2001	Guidelines for Kindergarten Education (Trial basis)	Influenced by Western theories and ideas
2003	Opinions from the Development (Units) including the Ministry of Education on Innovations and Development of Early Childhood Education	Cooperative document from various Departments
2010	National Plans for Medium- and long-Term Education reform and Development (2010-2020)	set concrete goals for ECEC development
2010	Issues regarding Current Development of Early Childhood Education	ECE as a measure of Peoples' well-being
2011	Issues on Increasing Financial Investment and support in Early Childhood Education Development	Increasing investment to central and western areas
2012	Issues regarding the Development of 0-3 Childcare services Pilot Project	The government efforts in improving childcare services
2016	Kindergarten Work regulations	replace the 1996 regulations

(Source: Ministry of Education of the republic of China 1932; 1952, 1981, 1989, 1996, 2001, 2012, 2016; China National People's Congress's 1991; China state Council 2003, 2010a, 2010b: Adopted by Xiaofei Qi and Edward C. Melhuish (2017) Early childhood education and care in China: history, current trends and challenges, *Early Years*, 37:3, 268-284, DOI: [10.1080/09575146.2016.1236780](https://doi.org/10.1080/09575146.2016.1236780))

Since the 1980s the Chinese government have introduced a number of reforms to raise quality in ECEC. However, despite all these changes and improvements at policy level, the public services were dramatically reduced (Zhou 2011) with an increase of private services filling the gap. This led to public complaints, covered widely in social media, urging the government to introduce measurements on how to include the private sector, but at the same time to develop affordable ECEC services (Liu 2010, Pang 2010).

#### **7.1.4 From 2010 to present: The National Plans for Medium- and Long-term Reform and Development**

In 2010 the government, after extensive consultations, published the National Plans for Medium- and Long-Term Education Reform and Development (2010-2020), setting the targets for education and ECEC. Within the plan it is aimed that by 2020 preschool education will become free and provided for all children. Chapter 3 of the plan is concerned with ECEC. Zhou (2015) reviewing the provisions of the Plan explains:

*Article 5 raises the goal of better access to early childhood programs for children aged 3-6 over the next decade. It indicates that early childhood education is critical for young children's health, habit formation and intellectual development. Early childhood programs need to acknowledge children's developmental nature, use scientific teaching methods and ensure that children develop in a healthy and happy manner. [...] [U]p to the year 2020, all children in China will have full access to one year of early childhood education; most children in China should have full access to two years of early childhood education, and three years of early childhood education should be accessible for the children in developed areas. Attention should be also paid to the education of children from birth to three. (p. 31)*

Many Chinese researchers critiqued the changes in ECEC (Ho and Tikly 2012, Zhou 2015, Qi and Melhuish 2017, Li and Chen 2017, Wang and Ho 2018, Yang 2019) and concluded that this reform was an important development as it placed ECEC as a significant priority in the government agenda of children's services for protecting and improving their lives. Within the plan strategic aims are set on how the government will build ECEC to offer convenient, flexible and diverse programmes for children and parents, involving other stakeholders, such as the private sector. It also showed a commitment to invest funding towards ECEC, especially in rural areas and for migrant children, to build teacher capacity, improve the teacher child ratio and raise quality in teachers' standards by introducing minimum qualifications and regulating and managing the private sector. To ensure that the targets set in the plan will be met, the government introduced the Three Year Action Plan (2014-



2016) where each county in the country was required to develop a 3-year action plan to raise quality in ECEC by identifying at a local level the condition and challenges, develop strategies and set goals and tasks for development, including teachers' training. These plans will be collected by each county by the provincial government to further develop a 3-year plan based on these submissions.

To summarise, under the radical changes in policies and reforms, ECEC in China is developing rapidly. 2010 was an important year as China introduced a number of policies, such as the National Plans for Medium and Long-term Reform and Development (2010-2020), Preschool Education Three-Year Action Plan, to strongly prompt the development of preschool education. According to the China Pre-school Education (Kindergarten) Industry Research Report in 2016, as of 2014 China had invested RMB204.876 billion in preschool education, 8.37 times that in 2009, to try and overcome the challenges and raise quality in ECEC services across the country. They have found that all these developments at policy level has led to:

1. A dramatic increase in the number of kindergartens, especially private ones. The number of kindergartens increased from 116,000 in 2003 to approximately 219,000 at the end of 2015 with a CAGR of 5.4 per cent; wherein, the number of private kindergartens swelled from 55,500 to 143,500 at a CAGR of 8.2 per cent.
2. Due to mainly economic disparities (urban-rural disparities), there are significant differences among different regions. For example, in 2015, Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and other economically developed regions saw the gross enrolment rate of 3-year preschool education hit more than 95 per cent while the central and western regions (such as Tibet, Yunnan, Guangxi and Ningxia) only about 60 per cent.
3. An increase of private companies getting involved in ECEC.
4. An increase in using the internet to brand private kindergarten by building websites to facilitate the interaction with parents, present online orientation courses or enrol children.

In conclusion, examining the relevant publications available based on empirical research (e.g. Deng et al 2001, Zhao and Hu 2008, Hu and Szente 2008, Zhu and Zhang 2008, Li and Li 2003), ECEC has seen a number of changes through the years. At a government level there seems to be a commitment to improve ECEC. However, several challenges meant that ECEC developed slowly and in a patchy way (Qi and Melhuish 2017), being an amalgamation of different ideologies and practices (Li and Chen 2017).

From the start of ECEC in China, there were many influences linked with political changes taking place in the country (Li and Chen 2017). The development of Chinese ECEC has been shaped



by the trend of integrating western educational philosophy into national curriculum guidance for classroom practices which, in some cases, either have ignored the traditional Chinese philosophy and culture or be in tension (Wang and Ho 2018). This, as will be discussed later, has left teachers to struggle in daily practices in terms of implementing practices as they were faced with a curriculum and practices that were not considered as culturally appropriate to them and there was lack of experiences, preparation and practical tools (Liu and Feng 2005, Li, Wang and Wong 2011). From the start of the ECEC in China, however, except for the ten years of the Cultural Revolution, all governments have shown commitment to raise quality and develop a system which cares for and educates all young children. Focus has been mainly placed in full day programmes for children ages 3 to 6 and very little attention was paid to under 3s that traditionally were more likely to stay home with grandparents. Moreover, very little attention has also been paid in caring and educating children with special needs (Tsegay, Kansale and Goll 2017, Pan et al 2018).

In sum, despite all the attempts to increase capacity and raise the standards of public ECEC, public services have been limited and has left ECEC to rely on the private sector and private family care programmes. In 2000s there were reforms which attempted to improve the quality of ECEC and increase the capacity in the public sector. However, these was not considered as successful. Thus, the introduction of the National Plans for Medium- and Long-Term Education Reform and Development (2010-2020) responded to the public demands for capitalising on private sector and aims now to utilise private sector in raising ECEC quality.

## 8. EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE: CURRENT TRENDS

Examining the available research written in English, it is concluded that currently in China there are several achievements in developing ECEC which are classified according to the age of children:

Nurseries (0-3 years)

Kindergartens (3-6 years)

Preschools (5-6 years)

The Systems Approach for Better Education Results-Early Child Development (SABRE-ECD 2016) collects and analyses comprehensive information on ECEC policies around the world and in the recent published report in China explains the current situation:

*Overall, in China four categories of ECE provisions are found: (a) three-year kindergartens or Youer Yuan, (b) one-year pre-primary class or Xueqian Ban, (c) three-year kindergartens attached to rural primary schools or Cunxiaofu you, and (d) rural community ECE centers or Zaojiao Dian. While China has been considerably successful in expanding its provision of at least one-year ECE program to all children, its three-year provision is relatively behind, particularly in rural areas. (p. 9).*

As was shown earlier a series of national policies and laws exist in order to protect children's right to access early childhood services in health, nutrition, education, and social integration (OECD 2018, 2016, SABRE-ECD 2016, World Bank 2016), but pre-school education is not free or compulsory. The National Plans for Medium- and Long-Term Education Reform and Development (2010-2020) have set targets of achieving pre-school enrolment for 95 per cent of five-year-olds, 80 per cent for four-year-olds, and 70 per cent for three-year-olds by 2020. In the OECD report in 2018 it was found that ECEC is provided mainly by private institutions, and approximately 54 per cent of 3-5 year olds are enrolled in pre-primary education in private institutions.

Pan et al (2018), based on the Chinese Minister of Education statistics, found that there is a rise in the number of children enrolled in kindergartens in 2016 to 44.14 million from 7.88 million in 1978 and the enrolling rate of eligible children in 3 year kindergarten education has risen from 11.4 to 77.4.

Zhou (2015) explains that currently, the number of children aged 0-6 is about 99.3 million, 8.14 per cent of the total population. Among the child population, more than 50 per cent are less than three years of age. More than 60 per cent of these children live in rural areas.

These statistics are provided here as indicative of the population of young children and the demand for ECEC. What is evident from the available publications is that the country has moved to adopt a more market-based approach in providing ECEC (e.g. Nyland et al 2016). Zhang and Maclean (2012) argue that these changes have seen a shift from state funded ECEC to private funded service provision “*and not a simple one-directional movement of marketization*” (p. 664).

Zhang and Maclean have divided the sector into four categories depending on the organising body. They found that the public ECEC is perceived as the most prestigious and includes:

1. education department (ED) centres, funded by state and municipal governments,
2. community run kindergartens, also considered public, supported by local government,
3. work-unit run kindergartens and
4. private kindergartens.

In the figure below (Figure 1) Zhang and Maclean (2012, p. 669), based on The Educational Statistics Yearbook of China in 2010, illustrate how the private sector has become the major provider of ECEC in China:

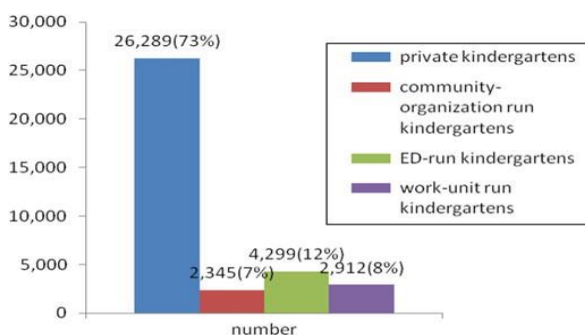


Figure 1. Provision of early childhood education in urban China in 2010. Numbers of different types of kindergartens in urban China, 2010. Source: The Educational Statistics Yearbook of China (2010).

Pen et al (2018), based on an extensive Chinese literature review and Ministry of Education reports and statistics, evaluated all these reforms and policies conclude that many achievements have been made towards the development of ECEC in China:

*But these policies still have problems not solved and challenges in implementation. First, they still exploit the old structure of funding bodies though the focus of funding objectives was changed a lot. The policies stipulated the government should raise funding and construct rational cost sharing system, but the main funding bodies remain at local government mainly at the level of county and town and countryside, and the percentage of the government at different levels and families was not defined clearly. Within current revenue and tax system, the government at the lower level has weaker financial capacity, otherwise shoulder much heavier responsibilities for social welfare. To guarantee the funding as proposed by the policy, the funding bodies should be lifted to the government at a higher level with stronger financial capacity, if the macro revenue and tax system not be reformed. Second, the local government could not keep abreast with the central government*

*in basic value orientation and management mode. China is centralized in politics and decentralized in administration. In many contexts, the local government could not accurately understand and implement the policy issued by central government. For example, the central policy required the government should play leading role and should energetically develop public kindergarten and form the setup that both public and private kindergartens develop simultaneously. But in a 3-year developmental plan, the local government invested most in building, rebuilding, or extending public kindergartens; therefore the number of public kindergartens grows dramatically. As to the social economic capacity, the government does not have enough public revenue to provide universal public kindergartens for all eligible children at this stage. Therefore, it is not a sustainable developmental mode to rely totally on the government's public revenue without employing market and volunteer mechanism. (p. 608).*

Thematically analysing published work, that is based either on systematic literature reviews to critique ECEC in China (e.g. Pan et al 2018, Li and Chen 2017, Qi and Melhuish 2017, Wu 2011, Lue 2011) or empirical work (e.g. Hong and Luo 2012, Hu and Li 2012, Li et al 2014, Hu, Zhou and Roberts 2014, Li, Pan and Chen 2015, Zhou 2015, Wang and Ho 2018, Lin and Yang 2019, Lin and Li 2018, 2019, Chen et al 2019, Yang and Li 2019), shows the key themes to emerge as the main challenges in developing ECEC in China (which will be discussed in the sections below) are :

- *Urban-rural disparities, public funding and distribution of funds that impacts on all other themes;*
- *Under developed provision for children from 0-3 years;*
- *A curriculum that derives from a hybrid of mainly three cultures;*
- *Quality assurance issues and child outcomes;*
- *Teacher education and professional development;*
- *Parents engagement and involvement.*

## **8.1 Urban -rural disparities, public funding and distribution of funds**

Similar to other levels of education, ECEC is impacted by the disparities between urban and rural areas. Due to socio-political changes, China has faced ill balanced socio-economic development among Eastern and Western regions and between urban and rural areas (e.g. Law and Pan 2009, Chen and Fung 2013, Lai et al 2014, Hu et al 2014, Hu et al 2016, Tsegay et al 2017, Wang, Luo and Rozelle 2017, Pan et al 2018).

SABRE-ECD (2016) examining statistics and concluded that while China has made improvements to expand ECEC programmes across the country to all children, the rural areas are still behind as illustrated in Table 2:

Table 2: Rural and Urban Pre-primary GER, China, 2006-12, percent

Year	One			One-year		
	Urban	Rural	Disparity	Urban	Rural	Disparity
2006	58.05	29.63	28.42	72.08	50.14	21.94
2007	62.11	29.86	32.25	74.85	49.51	25.34
2008	65.63	31.73	33.9	78.96	50.78	28.18
2009	67.72	33.13	34.59	77.05	49.03	28.02
2010	69.76	34.95	34.81	75.68	48.12	27.56
2011	87.72	28.59	59.13	76.37	29.64	46.73
2012	89.10	29.69	59.41	81.24	31.70	49.54

(Source: China Population & Employment Statistical Yearbook and China Education Statistical Yearbook, in Hong et al. 2015.)

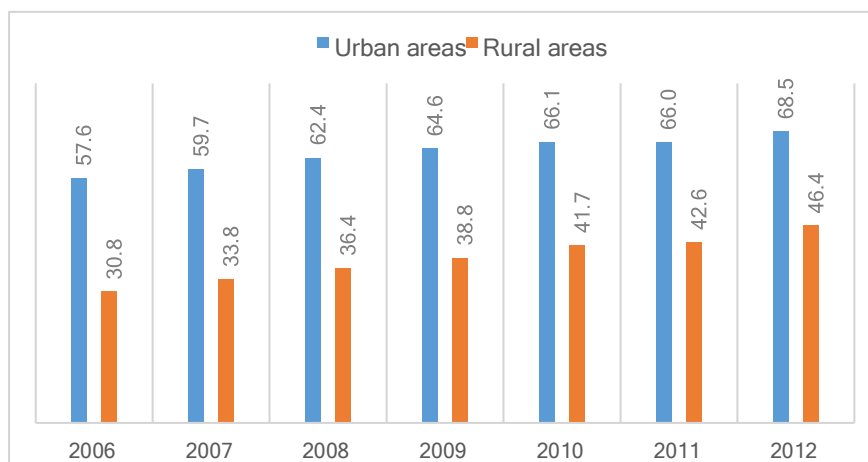
More recently Pan et al (2018) examined national statistics in China and found that the resources allocated for ECEC are lower compared to the needs of developing universal ECEC and the allocated resources are unequal, mainly favouring urban areas which has resulted “in compressive, systematic, and multilevel uneven development among different geographical regions and social stratum between urban and rural areas” (p. 604). Research points out that due to the financial disparities among geographical areas the urban areas (especially the eastern ones) gain more funding on public ECEC and, subsequently, the development of ECEC in East advanced regions is better than in Middle and West regions where many children do not have the same access or no access to basic ECEC. The quality and quantity of ECEC, the enrolment rate, the number of educational degree and qualifications of teachers in rural areas are behind than in urban areas (Hong and Luo 2012). Liu et al. (2012a, b), based on observations of 108 classes in kindergartens (including reception classes in primary schools) in cities, counties, and countryside in three provinces (East, Middle and West), found that the quality of physical environment, daily care, curriculum and teacher-child interactions in kindergartens in the countryside was significantly worse than in cities and counties.

SABRE-ECD (2016) provided statistics from 2006 to 2012 which pointed out that the urban-rural gap is also reflected in the quantity and qualification of kindergarten teachers in China. In examining programme quality disparities in ECEC Hu et al (2014) found that the urban teacher-student ratio and the average number of teachers per class are up to two, and sometimes three, times higher than those in rural areas. In 2012 the average student-teacher ratio in kindergartens was 21:1 in urban areas and 45:1 in rural areas (Hong et al 2015):

Table 3: Urban and Rural Kindergarten Teachers Allocation, 2006-2012.

Year	Kindergarten teachers		Student-teacher ratio		Avg. no. of teachers per class	
	Urban areas	Rural areas	Urban areas	Rural areas	Urban areas	Rural areas
2006	586,558	189,933	21:1	55:1	1.49	0.48
2007	636,716	190,049	21:1	54:1	1.51	0.50
2008	689,954	208,598	21:1	51:1	1.55	0.55
2009	753,456	232,433	20:1	49:1	1.57	0.60
2010	868,379	275,846	20:1	44:1	1.57	0.66
2011	1,113,913	201,721	22:1	49:1	1.34	0.48
2012	1,249,674	229,563	21:1	45:1	1.44	0.58

In comparing qualifications between the urban rural areas in China Hong et al (2015) found that the rural areas lagged significantly behind in child teacher ratio and overall qualifications as shown in Figure 2:



Source :Hong et al, 2015

Figure 2: The Urban-Rural Distribution of Teachers' Qualification above an Associate Bachelor Degree, 2006-12 (%)

Moreover, the way ECEC is funded adds to this disparity. It has been found that ECEC funded by government branches and educational authorities have better quality than the ones sponsored by the private sector (Song 2011), with the rural areas relying mainly on private sectors. This impacts on conditions, staff qualification and stability, classroom environment quality leading to unequal and uneven development of ECEC across the country, creates a disparity of ECEC programme quality (Hu and Robert 2013, Hu et al 2016) and a widening education gap in children's achievements (Luo et al 2012, Rao et al 2012, Zhou, Li and Roberts 2014, Wang 2017). For example, two empirical studies found rural Chinese children are significantly behind in mathematics compared to children from urban areas (Pan, Qiu, Zhou and Liu, 2011), language and literacy (Qin, Shi, and Liu, 2011). Wang et al (2011) suggest that this educational gap between urban and rural children will have future implications in educational attainment and college matriculation for rural students.

Hu et al (2016) warn that without the Chinese government investing more in rural areas parents who cannot access public ECEC services and afford private ECEC of reasonable quality the education gap of their children will widen as well as their quality of life. Based on an empirical research that examined ECEC in Hebei province, a disadvantaged rural area, they suggest that for the future improvement and well-being of children and their families in rural China there is a need to reform policy to increase quality by affiliating quality kindergartens with existing elementary public school structures and to improve teacher quality by advancing teacher benefits, professional status and professional development opportunities.

In an earlier study it is suggested that more research is needed to examine how to (1) institute a funding mechanism that will give every rural child equal access to a high-quality public kindergarten, (2) recruit and retain high-quality teachers for rural village kindergartens, and (3) motivate private kindergartens serving the most economically disadvantaged population to improve the structural and process quality of their services (Hu et al 2014).

The rural-urban divide has created migration from rural to urban areas with families seeking a better way by leaving and finding better education for their children (Wang et al 2017). The biggest group of children suffering educational disadvantage in China are children of internal migrants (Goodburn, 2009, Nyland et al 2016). Migrant children are not unconditionally entitled to enrol in urban public schools (Lai et al 2014) and consequently are unable to attend public schools in large

urban areas (Chen and Feng 2013). Moreover, the quality of education in private migrant schools may be low and impacting on the education achievements of these children (Zao, Yu, Wang and Glauben 2014). Pen et al (2018) explain that the economic divide between urban and rural areas, reflects on families' social status. They found that:

*Families of higher social status more likely possess quality early childhood education than those of lower social status. The studies of Xu and Chen (2007) in Shanghai, Li (2010) in Wuhan, and Sun (2013) in Nanjing all revealed the same pattern of allocation of ECE resources among families of different social status that children from families of advantaged social status went into public kindergartens with higher quality. Zhang Yan found that the tuition fee of public and private kindergartens went far beyond the buying capacity of migrant workers, and their children either stay at home or enroll in illegal kindergartens without official registration (Jin et al. 2005). There were 1266 registered kindergartens in Beijing, but 1298 kindergartens without registration in 2009 (Political Consultative Committee Member investigation 2009). These kindergartens without registration scattered in the rural-urban fringe zone, and 95% children enrolled in these kindergartens were from migrant worker family (Zhang and Li 2010). In one word, most of quality public ECE resources are possessed by children from families of advantaged social status in cities. (p. 605).*

In analysing the ECEC policy in China and focusing on the urban-rural disparities that challenge the implementation of the National Plans for Medium- and Long-Term Education Reform and Development (2010-2010) in relation to ECEC, Tsegay et al (2017) propose bridging this divide requires social participation and strengthening of both public and private kindergartens by increasing government inputs, training of teachers and improving management of pre-school education. They also suggest that the government should regulate the tuition fees and support families that cannot afford pre-school education by increasing support to provide education for children from disadvantaged regions, and poor families. They urge for:

*Setting guidelines on kindergarten charges, and management including setting up of preschool education networks between private and government-sponsored kindergartens. Training of teachers to be creative such as to make learning materials from the community resources, even in very disadvantaged regions, with less expenses. (p. 79).*

In summary, the urban-rural disparities impact on the development of ECEC and its quality across China, in terms of quality of teachers and educational programmes, affecting children's educational achievements. The limited resources and the uneven distribution of funding is a main challenge for



universal ECEC in China as set by the National Plans for Medium- and Long-term Education Reform and Development (2010-2020).

## 8.2 Under developed provision for children from 0-3 years

Although many attempts have been made to increase quality of provision for 3 to 6 years children, the ECEC for children from 0 to 3 years in China is under developed. This limited interest in the ECEC for children under the age of 3 is also reflected in the limited publications researching these ages. In our search for published work in relation to this age group we found very few studies (Pan et al 2018, Qi and Melhuish 2017, Tsegay et al 2017, Zhu 2007) that make specific mention to this age group and the existing provision.

ECEC for 0-3 years is provided in different settings. The two main types are nurseries that offer custodial care for children of working parents and early learning development centres that provide activities aiming to enhance physical, language, social and cognitive development (Qi and Melhuish 2017). As mentioned earlier traditionally children under the age of 3 years were looked after by the grandparents (Zhu 2007). There were some sporadic childcare centres mainly provided by factories, schools and hospitals. However, the economic reforms of 1990s resulted in closing state owned factories and subsequently these childcare services were either closed or became private.

Zhu (2007) explains that in urban areas, at the age of one year and half, some children go to kindergartens that provide toddler programs, while others go to private home day care however these services are either limited or not available in rural areas.

Since the introduction of reforms for ECEC by the Chinese government, some attention had started being paid to under 3s. The first mention of provision for under 3s was made in the Chinese Children Development Guidelines (2001-2010). Qi and Melhuish (2017) critically reviewing the development of ECEC in China inform us that:

*In 2003, 0-3 childcare was first highlighted as part of the national early years' education development plan in which the government aimed to improve integrated 0-6 child care and education services by enhancing care workers' capacity and parents' caring skills at home (China State Council 2003). This is important since childcare services before were mainly managed by the health department and other welfare relevant departments, and regulations on childcare services such as Regulations on the Management of Health and Hygiene in Nurseries and Kindergartens focused mainly on health services (MOE (Ministry of Education, China) 1994).*

*Following the progressive development of preschool education (3-6) since 2010, Issues regarding the development of 0-3 childcare services pilot project was initiated, specifying that for regions and cities with 85% (or higher) of enrolment for three years of preschool education, and with experience and resources in providing public childcare services, should be qualified for the '0-3 childcare pilot project' (MOE 2012d). This highlights the central government's efforts in improving 0-3 childcare services. It also reveals that interest in childcare (0-3) does not match the interest in preschool education (3-6), and the priority nowadays in China is developing preschool programmes for children before primary school. (p. 280).*

Currently, according to UNICEF's report in 2017, the Ministry of Education works collaboratively with them to shift attention to the 0-3 age group. Work is invested in developing Early Learning Development Guidelines (ELDGs) for this age group. Combined with UNICEF's two integrated community-based ECD 0-3 pilot models in 146 centres (one IECD model led by NHFPC and the other model focusing on early stimulation/education and parental education supported by the All China Women's Federation), the ELDGs helped push the integrated 0-3 Early Child Development agenda forward. This is being further complemented with 20 newly-established Integrated Child Friendly Development Centres, operating out of Child-Friendly Spaces.

*Strong progress was achieved in delivering ECD services for children aged 0-3 years through a community-based programme in Hunan, Hubei, Hebei, Shanxi, Guizhou and Xinjiang provinces. Across these programmes, 146 centres offered centre-based services to 13,427 children, home-based services through 19,933 home visits that reached more than 9,841 families, and outreach services through 510 outreach visits reaching more than 5,000 children and their parents/caregivers with knowledge-building sessions and practical support for games and reading activities. (UNICEF 2017, p. 34).*

Although there is an increasing interest in providing for 0-3 children and progress is being made, UNICEF (2017) concluded that there is limited expertise available to address the child developmental needs of this age group. There is shortage of staff, lack of knowledge and experience working with this age group and lack of funding, especially in the poorer western areas.

### **8.3 A curriculum that derives from a hybrid of mainly three cultures**

In the OECD (2016) report on China it is stated: *"[i]n 2001, a new curriculum framework was established. The framework encouraged diversification. There was a shift from centralisation to a*

*joint effort between the central government, local authorities and schools. The role of the government has changed from one of command to one of service. In 2011, the government instituted a renewed version of the educational framework which allowed even more flexibility” (p. 22)*

Subsequently a three-level curriculum model has been developed at the national, regional and school level. This approach allows the involvement of central government, local authorities and schools in developing the most suitable curriculum for the local context (OECD 2016).

The 2001 Guidelines for Kindergarten Education (Trial basis) focused on ECEC curriculum under five key domains: health, science, language, arts and social studies and covered only the age group 3 to 6 (Zhu 2009). These guidelines are widespread across the country and ECEC hosting children from 3-6 years are encouraged to develop their own curriculum such as the integrated-themed curriculum model employed in Shanghai (Qi and Melhuish 2017). Such an approach has resulted in diverse curricula practices. For example, in Zhu’s 2007 work the most popular approaches of curriculum are described:

*The most popular type of kindergarten program is called You Er Yuan. This is usually a full day program for children aged 3-6, or in some areas age 5 only and age 6 only. The school day lasts from 7:30am to 5:00 pm. Children either have one meal and two snacks or three meals and two snacks in the center each day. Parents are responsible for paying the cost of the food. In recent years, the service of boarding kindergarten (overnight accommodations) has been welcomed by some busy working parents in urban areas. Half-day programs are rare. The children in this kindergarten program are usually grouped by age, although mixed age grouping does exist. Teachers who work in kindergartens are required to have at least three years of professional training. An independent early childhood education institute for children below the age of three is another type of program called Tuo Er Suo. This is an infant nursery that usually provides full-day service. The operation of these nurseries is the same as that of kindergartens and may be partially funded by the government, work places or individuals. In recent years, this type of program has been integrated into kindergarten programs in some urban areas. Teacher qualification in these programs is usually not as good as that of kindergartens.*

*A third type of program that has emerged recently is called Zao Jiao Zhong Xin. This is an early childhood education center. These centers also provide services for children below the age of three. Financially supported by local governments or other resources, these centers usually provide free or hourly rate education programs such as teacher directed activities for infants and toddlers, or parent-child activities. Some of these centers are independently built and others are affiliated with regular kindergartens. In either case, the teachers in regular kindergartens play an important role in providing the service. These centers may have some branches called early childhood education stations, which are located in local communities. An informal childcare service for children before the age of three is private home care, which is provided by individual families. This kind of service usually has a flexible schedule and the payment can be negotiated. (p. 967).*

However, research in recent years is focusing on critiquing the current curriculum and its cultural appropriateness for borrowing from western countries without taking into consideration the rich Chinese cultural context (Zhu 2015). As was shown in the section discussing the historical developments in ECEC in China, there were three main influences in shaping the ECEC that are mirrored in the context and content of the curriculum: Western ideals (with emphasis on Dewey, Montessori and Froebel), Soviet Union (subject based curriculum) and Chinese culture. All three have impacted in the development of what many researchers call a Chinese Hybrid Culture in ECEC (e.g. Wang and Spodek 2000; Zhu and Wang 2005; Li 2005, Zhu and Zhang 2008, Zhu 2015, Yang 2016, Li, Yang and Chen 2016, Li and Chen 2017, Yang and Li 2018 a and b). Among publications available in English, researchers are in agreement that the social and political transformations in China since 1900s and the ideological influences have shaped the curriculum and today are a hybrid of “*interactions and interconnections between three distinct cultures, namely, traditional Chinese culture, communist (or politically correct ‘socialist’) culture and Western culture*” (Li and Chen 2017, p. 1476, see also Yang and Li 2019).

The Chinese culture is rooted in the influence of Confucius (Lin 2008). Wang and Ho (2018) explain:

*Confucius described five pairs of basic human relations, called Wu Lun, each with its own principles: Sovereign and Subject - loyalty and duty; Father and Son - love and obedience; Husband and Wife - obligation and submission; Elder and Younger Brothers - seniority and modeling; and Friend and Friend - trust (Fan, 2000). The Confucian concept of Wu Lun,*

*especially the first four relationships, has shaped the human relationships between leaders and followers in Chinese organizations” (p. 3)*

Li et al (2018), in examining and comparing curricula from around the world, describe the Confucian beliefs and philosophy as being based on seeking harmony in social relationships and emphasising collective ideology “*filial piety, ancestral unity, primogeniture and lineage. It acknowledges the social obligations; respecting teachers, parents and elders; and building harmony relationships with others*” (p. 593).

These values were embraced by the pioneer Chinese educationalists Dao (or Tao) Xingzhi (1891-1946), Zhang, Xuemen (1891-1973) and Chen Heqin (1892-1982) that orchestrated and initiated the ECEC curriculum experimental movement (Zhu 2007). They proposed the idea that the ECEC curriculum in China should be based on both Chinese kindergarten practices and learning from progressive western educational ideas and they developed different curriculum models such as ‘Action Curriculum’ (by Zhang Xuemen) and ‘Wholeness or Units Pedagogy’ (by Chen Heqin) (Wang 2004).

Qi and Melhuish (2017), in evaluating the ECEC curriculum developments in China acknowledged its hybrid nature and addressed the tensions that this entails:

*One major concern was the clash between advanced ideas and kindergarten practices. Professor Hua, who was a key figure in drafting the 2001 Guidelines, explained that the Guidelines borrowed ideas from abroad which were integrated under the concepts of ‘respecting children’ and ‘children’s life-long learning’. Hua pointed out that ‘the success of the reform depends on teachers’ understanding of how and why to teach children in the ways the Guidelines suggest’ (Tobin, Hsueh, and Karasawa 2009). Kindergarten teachers in China have been used to teacher- centred practices for a very long time, and it was not easy for them to adapt to a child-centred curriculum (Liu and Feng 2005; li, Wang, and Wong 2011). In short, there appear to be considerable gaps between progressive ideas and daily practices in kindergartens, and teachers in China face a number of challenges under the curriculum reforms. (pp. 272-273).*

Similarly, Hu, Zhou and Li (2017), based on analysis of Do 2001 and Pohl 2000 of the Chinese core values of ECEC with western programmes, pointed out that the “*deep rooted cultural*

*practices: submission to one's family, patriarch, and country and a stress on moderatism (zhongyong) and harmony (hexie) in a socially collective culture [...]. Chinese contexts present unique sociocultural features that differ dramatically from contexts in western countries. [...] As a result, Chinese kindergartens stress discipline and teaching of rules, with a strong focus on excellence in academics through prevalent use of traditional whole-group*" (p. 521). However, in a very recent research (Yang and Li 2019) that employed qualitative methodology to examine how Chinese traditions and modern ideas have impacted in ECEC practices found that the key conflicts in the curriculum implementation are the child-centeredness versus teacher directedness, individualism versus collectivism, and imported versus local approaches. They concluded that, these conflicts play a decisive role in teachers and parents beliefs of what constitutes an effective curriculum in ECEC in China.

There have been attempts to explore culturally appropriate curriculum as, for example, the case from Nanjing Normal University research which focused on exploring "new integrated curriculum" models (Li and Chen 2017), but the research examined here (please see references and Appendix 1) addresses the following challenges:

1. Teachers' education, development and ideologies (this will be explored in detail in the next section);
2. Theoretical understandings: an interdisciplinary approach based on child development, philosophy and sociology should form the foundations of ECEC curriculum. Research needs to focus on identifying cultural relative approaches, alongside contemporary international research, on developmentally appropriate practices based on play-based pedagogy and learning, child-centred ideologies and integration of child rights approach with emphasis on integrating children's voices;
3. Curriculum context, content, aims and objectives: these need to be examined in the light of the demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Li and Chen (2017) among others (e.g. Qi and Melhuish 2017, Yang and Li 2018a and b) propose that: "*Chinese ECE scholars should explore more workable curriculum models for delivering learning and teaching activities in culturally and developmentally meaningful ways. Furthermore, the curriculum content should be chosen according to the objectives of the Chinese curriculum and any new curriculum models*" (p. 1481). Hua (2007) warns that reforms in ECEC need to find a balance between cultural openness and cultural nativism;

4. Although progressive ideas are promoted within the Guidance for Kindergarten Education in 2001, and this document aimed to “*bridge the gap between progressive ideas and actual practices in preschools*” (Lim Wang and Wong 2011), from the published work that refers to curricula practices and teacher instruction in the class (e.g. Li and Rao 2005, Li et al 2008, Li, Rao and Tse 2012) whole-class direct instruction seems to be the predominant Chinese pedagogical mode. Based on Chinese values and tradition, it seems that classroom practices prioritise conformity, discipline and behavioural control and academic achievement (Li, Rao and Tse 2012, Li Wang and Wong 2011, Rao, Ng, and Pearson 2010). It also appears that teacher-directed approaches, direct instruction, subject teaching and teacher-directed activities are the most common practices among ECEC (please see also section 8.5.1.3 Pedagogy);
5. Core areas, similarly to other countries, are included in the curriculum (physical, social emotional, language and cognitive development), however, there is a need to develop quality standards (Tobin 2005, 2007) and learning environments where “*children [do not] lose their own voices on many important affairs*” (Pan et al 2018, p. 602) and their environment is not arranged according to adults’ decisions (Li et al 2016). Practices need to be developed that promote “*children’s play and outdoor activities, and interact with children in a more frequent, responsive and individualized manner*” (Li et al 2016, p. 435).
6. As ECEC is not part of the compulsory education continuation to primary entails a number of problems. There is a lack of curricula and pedagogical continuity (Li et al 2011). Thus, more research is needed to investigate culturally appropriate ways to bridge smooth continuation from ECEC to compulsory education;
7. The curriculum needs to expand and include the age group from 0-3 years and match the interest of ECEC for 3-6 years. However, the research cautions practices for 0-3s needs to be developmentally appropriate and not school like.

## 8.4 Literacy

There was limited research available in English in terms of effective pedagogy teaching literacy in ECEC. The available publications were either focusing on the complexity of teaching Chinese language or primary education.

Examining the available publications, it became evident that Chinese language is complex and has a very demanding orthography to learn (Li, Corrie and Wong 2008; Li and Rao 2000, 2005, Li 2014). Chinese is a morphosyllabic writing system in which each character reflects a syllable as well as a unit of meaning or morpheme (Shu, 2003). Li et al (2014), describing the complexities of the



Chinese language, notes that the character is the basic unit in the writing system and has three levels of orthographic structure: the stroke, stroke pattern and character structure. Each character is made up of between one and over 20 different strokes, with the average number of strokes being 11 for the complex characters used in Hong Kong and Taiwan, and nine for the simplified characters used in mainland China (Chan, 1982). Li (2014) and Li et al (2014) explain that like the grapheme in the alphabetic system, the stroke does not carry information concerning meaning, but the change of a stroke changes the meaning and sound of a character (e.g. ‘lost’; ‘arrow’; ‘husband’; and ‘sky’). Li et al (2008) and Li (2014), addressing the complexities of the Chinese language and its variations among different provinces, explains that: “*the term ‘literacy’ does not easily translate into Chinese as there is no literal Chinese equivalent of English sense of the word*” (p. 444). The actual translation of literacy in Chinese means “learn to read” but this translation has not been adopted by any Chinese dictionary (Li 2014). Li (2014) explains:

*Postiglione (personal communication, October 16, 1999) translated literacy into “学文化” [xue2 wen2 hua4] meaning “learning to be culturalized”. Which one is better? There is no clear answer. However, in this study, we defined this term in a conventional perspective and used “识字” [shi2 zhi4] as its Chinese equivalent, which means “being able to read and write” or “learning to read and write. (p. 8).*

Li et al (2012), based on an experimental study evaluating teaching strategies of literacy in three different cities (Shenzhen, Hong and Singapore), acknowledge that within the Chinese language there are different socio-lingual and educational contexts and suggest that:

*the direct transplanting of Western pedagogies into Chinese classrooms should be avoided because culture, language, parents, teachers, resources, education system, and other sociocontextual factors play very important roles in shaping Chinese literacy pedagogy. The distinctive orthography of the Chinese language, for example, determines to an extent the boundaries of pedagogical reforms. Cultural values, teacher and parent expectations, and the established educational system should never be overlooked when seeking to change the literacy practices in the early years. (p. 25).*

Li’s (2014) work, based on his own empirical and longitudinal studies, concludes that the most effective practices on teaching literacy in ECEC are the ones where firstly the grapheme/semantic association and visual/auditory discrimination emerges first. He found that children at the ages of 3 to 4 are able to acquire these skills and character recognition and utilisation appears later.



Comparing children in Beijing, Hong Kong and Singapore he identified distinctive patterns of literacy development:

*Phonetic-similarity and semantic-similarity error were identified as the common errors made by Hong Kong and Singaporean children, respectively, whereas non-significant common errors were found in Beijing children; and teachers' qualifications, and the home and classroom literacy index, were found to be significant predictors of the longitudinal development of Chinese literacy, even after controlling for the children's age.*

*The abovementioned patterns, however, might be shaped by many sociocontextual influences such as language policy, language education, early childhood curriculum, Chinese literacy pedagogy, teacher qualification, classroom size, parental expectation, and so on. (p. 23-24)*

Xie and Li (2018), examining parenting profiles in relation to school readiness, explain that young children in mainland China experience less pedagogical continuity in formal literacy teaching than children in Hong Kong. Children in China are learning to read and write at the age of 5-6 years. As the curriculum of ECEC is not centralised and each ECEC setting is encouraged to develop their own curriculum, teaching young children to write Chinese characters is officially restricted by the educational authorities (Li and Rao 2005, Li, Rao, and Tse 2012). Researchers have shown that children's early literacy is influenced more by the family process (parenting styles and practices) and home learning environment than by the ECEC that they attend. (Farver, Xu, Eppe, and Lonigan 2006, McWayne, Cheung, Wright, & Hahs-Vaughn, 2012).

The available research (e.g. Wu et al 1999, Li and Rao 2000, Shu et al 2001, Shu 2003, Li, Rao and Tse 2012, Li 2013, Xie and Li 2018) concludes that for effective early literacy more research is required, but the findings so far suggest that experiential learning, learning through play balanced with some learning through moderated formal literacy instruction and informal experiences, a continuity between home and school, ECEC and primary school are some useful strategies of early literacy learning. Li, Corrie and Wong (2008), examining early literacy skills and later outcomes, concluded (with some hesitation) -that due to the complicated nature of the Chinese orthography early literacy instruction might be valuable in early literacy acquisition and:

*The close alignment of expectations held by parents and teachers may contribute to children's literacy attainments by providing cohesive and continuous literacy experiences. This finding implies that more attention should be paid to the school-parent collaborations and the preschool-primary transitions to eradicate the discontinuity, horizontally and*

*vertically. By doing this, early literacy education (including formal and informal literacy activities) might be able, currently and longitudinally, to facilitate children's literacy development. (p.456).*

## 8.5 Quality, assurance issues and child outcomes

Prior to discussing issues around quality in the Chinese context it is important to acknowledge that the term 'quality' is much contested (Dahlberg, Moss and Pence 2007, Osgood and Giugni, 2016, Osgood et al 2017, Yelland and Bentley 2018). Quality and the search of what constitutes quality is constant the subject of researchers, educationalists and policy makers in many countries. What constitutes quality is "neither neutral nor self-evident, but saturated with values and assumptions" (Moss 2016: 10). Moss goes on to stress that quality is a constructed concept, and indeed it is often used as a proxy for 'good' education, which is also ill-defined:

*We can only evaluate early childhood education - make meaning of it and a judgement of value - by first deciding what we think is 'good' education, and deciding that depends on our answers to political questions, answers that will never be unanimously agreed. (Moss 2016: 12).*

Within the body of international literature on what quality is in early childhood education there is much debate of what quality means and a dichotomy of what educators conceptualise as quality compare to what governments and policy makers perceive as quality. Currently in many countries, at policy level, early childhood provision is dominated by the school readiness agenda where ECEC is seen a preparation stage for primary education. However, critiques based on research warns us that ECEC should be distinguished from schooling and:

*Preschool nurseries should encourage children to learn from adventurous play in a rich environment ... children too young to benefit from classroom schooling are eager participants in peer communities with their own meanings, arts and techniques (Travaranth 2011, p.175).*

### 8.5.1 Definitions of quality in the Chinese context

As has been shown above, since 1978 and the introduction of the Open Door policy, a series of extensive reforms took place that led to changes at all levels of life in China. Around this time government policies and laws alongside academic publications started "*promoting a more "modern" and "scientific" ways of treating the young. The declared aim has been to improve the lot of individual children but also to raise the "quality" (suzhi) of the entire nation. At the same time, the past few decades have also seen the rise of an idealized notion of childhood as a time of innocence and play rather than political activism or physical toil. Largely suppressed during the Mao era, this*

*view -which first emerged in China in the early decades of the twentieth century - has re-emerged and become more popular in recent decades, particularly among the ranks of a younger generation of urban, middle-class parents born after 1978' (Naftali 2016, p. 41-42).*

Naftali (2016), in her study drawing upon her own ethnographic research and broad literature, examined how Chinese childhood has been transformed in the last few decades due to social economic change and government policies and concludes that the search for quality led to a growing interest in improving children's lives. This resulted in a campaign that aimed to shift the image of a child being engaged in political struggles to a child that is engaging with play and fantasy (Naftali 2014).

This growing interest in psychological discourses of childhood was embraced by academics and popular media and led to the Chinese government's campaign for the "*quality of the population*" (*renkou suzhi*). This campaign targeted parents and caregivers promoting a more "*modern, objective*" approach of caring for and educating children (Naftali 2016). Parental investment was seen as central to promote quality and the term "family education" (*jiating jiaoyu*) was introduced (Anagnost 2008). Parents were seeing as playing an important role in the attempts to modernise China (Kuan 2015). Government attempts to raise children's quality showed parents as the key educators of their children by using scientific methods rather than being raised in the traditional way by family elders. This led to the Chinese government introducing "*education for quality*" (*sushi jiaoyu*) nationally in schools.

*[T]his ambitious programme summarizes a series of educational experiments implemented at the local and provincial levels since the 1980s. It includes the local an overhaul of the curriculum, teaching, and assessment methods of state schools, with the goal of fostering a "well-rounded" child a child who is developed intellectually (zhiyu), morally (deyu), physically (tiyu), and aesthetically (meiyu) and who would acquire the occupational skills necessary to compete in a global labor market. (Naftali 2016, p. 45)*

This campaign at government level to improve education quality opened the debate of what quality is and how to raise and educate children among parents, teachers, administrators, officials and academics (Kipnis 2001, Li and Rao 2005, Zhu and Wang 2005, Hu 2014). In an attempt to understand quality in the Chinese context, research examined factors that might impacted on

quality and these studies revealed the following: the urban-rural divide, study and play, pedagogy, measuring quality, moral and ideological tensions and children's rights, as will be explained below.

### 8.5.1.1 Quality in urban and rural areas

The promotion of the idea that to raise quality in education caring and educating the children needs to be in a “scientific”, “modern” way requiring parents to give increased attention to the child's psychological and educational development to some appears to favour the nuclear family rather than relying in the extended family which traditionally happened in the Chinese context, especially in rural areas (Drulhe 2002, Ye et al. 2010, Chen et al 2011, Goh 2011, Wen and Lin 2012, Binah-Pollak 2014, Chen et al 2019). There is the promotion of the idea that parents (mainly mothers) should be have the primary role for caring and educating their children and, although there is some mention to the role of the grandparents, they are often are considered as backward thinkers. However, the reality is that grandparents play a crucial role in a child's upbringing. The model of childrearing practices that is promoted thus is not realistic. The majority of families in urban and rural areas cannot afford the mother to have a part time job as a way of balancing work and childcare. Many rural families that migrate to the cities are forced to leave their children behind in their rural hometown due to the high costs and exclusionary policies imposed in urban areas. In a recent longitudinal study Chen et al (2019,) examining the NBS et al 2017 statistics, found that in 2015 about one quarter of all children in China (25.4. per cent) which means 68.8 million children were left behind in either rural or urban areas. This situation is impacting in the quality of these children's lives, with children having psychological problems such as low self-esteem, depression, social and cognitive problems such as lack of motivation at school (Wen and Lin 2012, Chen et al 2009).

Ethnographic and experimental studies (e.g. Lin 2011, Fong 2007a and b, Woronov 2009, Anagnost 2004) found that, as in other areas, the urban-rural disparities exist in the conceptualising of what constitutes quality in caring and educating the children as Anagnost (2004) illustrates: [t]his discourse for sushi (=quality) appears most elaborated in relation to two figures: the body of the rural migrant, which exemplifies sushi in its apparent absence, and the body of the urban, middle - class only child, which is fetishized as a site of accumulation of the very dimensions of sushi wanting in its “other” (p. 190).

Lin (2011), in an ethnographic study, found that schoolteachers distinguish between urban and rural children and tend to describe rural children as “brutal, impolite, self-abased, dirty and dark”

and spoke negatively about them and their families explaining why they think they are all these characteristics is down to “ a lack of family education or discipline as a consequence of the low educational level of their parents” that “have caused the children to lack good habits, broad horizons, self-esteem, and high academic achievement” (Lin 2011, pp. 318-319). Families that have migrated to urban areas to improve quality of their lives and their children are regarded by local officials and teachers as inferior to the urban children (Kipnis 2001, Lin 2011, Lan 2014). To conclude, Naftali (2016) cautions:

*[a]s urbanization continues and the ranks of the Chinese middle classes are predicted to grow over the next few decades, we may see a diffusion of new – and contested – models of childrearing and education to broader parts of Chinese society. We may also observe an improvement in the life conditions of rural and migrant children who have thus far been unable to enjoy the same education and development opportunities as local children in the cities. Conversely, however, distinctive patterns of children's care associated with an idealized global “middle-class modernity” may continue to serve as a key mechanism for the creation and maintenance of social difference in China. Social exclusion and discrimination of rural or non-Han children based on their perceived lack of quality (suzhi) may further deepen the country's current divides, by reproducing these children's lower status in decades to come. (p.190).*

### 8.5.1.2 Study and play

A growing number of studies examine how parental attitudes towards child rearing practices might have been influenced by the quest to improve quality in child caring and reducing approaches promoting modern scientific ways (Fong 2004, Naftali 2010, Kuan 2015, Chen et al 2009, 2019). They have found that an increasing number of parents ensure that their children spent a significant amount of time studying or engaging in adult structured activities that will gain or improve children’s skills. This has resulted in decrease of free play. For example, Naftali (2010), studying primary school children, found that in Shanghai children from middle-class families wake up at 6:30am and stay at school until 4:30 and on their return to home they are faced with large amount of homework. Even in the weekends their days are filled with either school related activities or after school activities with limited time for play or relaxation.

In a more recent study Chen et al (2019) studied children from the age of 3 to 6 and found that parents in urban areas were significantly more involved than rural areas or caregivers of left-behind children from migrant families, with activities such as reading to the child, buying books

and supervising homework. Research concludes that the time left to children for leisure activities and play is limited. This has led to children in China facing emotional difficulties caused by pressure at school and high expectations. However, in the most recent study available in English (Chen et al 2019) that examined among other children's psychological and social well-being, it was found that although there is an increase in emotional difficulties related to family structures, gender differences, urban and rural areas there is no mention on study pressures and limited time for relaxation and play. Most of the research that examines primary age children concludes that Chinese parents prefer their children to invest in studying rather than playing as building skills for the future. Pen et al (2018), reviewing the 2008 Research team of General Education Institute findings, concluded that few parents choose interest class according to the child's wishes. Free time belonging to children for leisure activities chosen by the child has been decreased as well as free public spaces for children's play and entertainment and a reduction of natural play environment and neighbourhood space.

### 8.5.1.3 Pedagogy and Curriculum

The quest for quality in ECEC is also mirrored in the promotion of a pedagogy that emphasises children's individuality, initiated activities and learning through play (e.g. Li et al 2014). Subsequently, ideas of a pedagogy and a curriculum that promote child-centred approach (teaching philosophy), integrated teaching (teaching strategy), inquiry-based learning and learning through play (learning approach), small class or group learning (classroom organisation), child-initiated and process-oriented activities (teaching activities) are emerging in published research (Li and Rao 2005, Ng and Rao, 2005, Tobin, Hsueh, and Karasawa, 2009, Rao, Ng, Pearson 2010, Liu 2011, Wu, Yong and Cai 2012, Hu et al 2014). Researchers have started studying western effective pedagogies such as The Project Approach, Reggio Emilia, High/Scope and how these can be implemented in ECEC in China (Hu 2014, Zhu and Zhang 2008).

However, from the publications that were examined in this review, it became evident that although there are some good examples of research and practice the traditional Chinese pedagogy in ECEC often emphasises conformity, discipline, behavioural control and academic achievement (Rao, Ng, and Pearson 2010). It features teacher directed approach (teaching philosophy), direct instruction and subject teaching (teaching strategy), content-based learning and learning through exercising (learning approach), whole class teaching (classroom organisation), achievement-oriented and teacher-directed activities (teaching activities). Most classroom activities are carried out in whole class, with all children involved in the same activity (Pearson and Rao 2003).

A 2014 study, conducted by Li et al on the quality in ECEC in China, noted that few large-scale studies are conducting examining quality of ECEC pedagogy, especially in relation of child assessment, child outcomes and what constitutes an effective early childhood environment. They also concluded that:

*[d]espite the large number of Chinese children in kindergarten settings and some evidence that kindergarten quality may be low in China, very little is known about kindergarten quality and its relationship with child outcomes in the Chinese context. Although previous studies have provided much-needed information, they have been relatively small and may not represent what is typical in China. (p. 429).*

It became evident that in terms of quality in pedagogy the research is concerned with limited examination on effective pedagogy on:

- Types of assessment and measurements that exist in ECEC;
- What child outcomes should be in ECEC and how they can be documented;
- What the most effective training, credentials and practice for teachers is in order to be able to assess child and learning outcomes;
- What technical assistance system in support of ECEC teachers and quality indicators are the most effective and culturally appropriate;
- How high quality teaching, learning activities, supporting children's free play and outdoor activities can be achieved;
- How interactions with children can become more responsive, individualised and child centred rather than teacher directed.

#### **8.5.1.4 Measuring the quality of ECEC**

The Department of Education (DOE) monitors the quality of all types of public ECEC in China through mandatory assessment periodically (Hu and Szente 2009, Li et al 2014, Hu, Zhou and Roberts 2014, Zhang, Luo, Tao and Dong 2015). National legal requirements apply to all ECEC seeking a licensure. When qualified, settings can apply for a level and category rating according to standards set by each province. Based on national laws and regulations, each state proposes a definite and detailed document that lists performance indicators for each level and category of quality. These performance indicators range from structural qualities (facility furnishing requirement, teacher-child ratio, teacher qualifications, etc.) to process qualities (curriculum,



student-teacher interaction, etc.). Based on total scores from several observers, the kindergarten will receive a final rating for level and/or category of quality. Hu and Szente (2009), reporting the example from Beijing, explained that the top quality kindergarten rated by the DOE is called “city’s model kindergarten”, below that is “city’s level one category one kindergarten”, and then “level one category two”, “level two category one”, “level two category two”, “level three category one”, and “level three category three.” Some research (e.g. Li and Hu 2012, Rao, Sun, Zhou and Zhang 2012, Li et al 2014) is examining the ECERS-R, performance standards and how they can be applied in ECEC to measure quality of educational programmes or the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) to evaluate child-teacher interactions (Hu et al 2018). Whilst earlier Pang, Liu, and Hu (2008) developed a research instrument based on the Kindergarten Curriculum Guide to explore the relationship between programme quality, cost, and effectiveness. It is reported in the work of Li et al (2014) that in 1992 Zhang, Zhu, Chen, and Wang (article is published in the Chinese language) that The Child Developmental Scale of China (age 3-6) is the one that used to collect data on the child’s outcomes. The CDSC is a norm-referenced test that contains four subscales:

1. Language (25 items) evaluating vocabulary, understanding and expression/use of language
2. Early Mathematics (56 items) evaluating how a child classifies, shape recognition, numbering and calculating activities
3. Social Cognition (25 items) evaluating child’s social skills, social knowledge, social relationships and early moral judgment
4. Physical Movement (5 items) evaluating a child’s gross and fine motor skills.

However, there are very few large-scale studies examining the overall quality of ECEC and how it is associated with child outcomes and the ones that exist are using western approaches to measure quality. Nearly all researchers that attempt to examine ways to measure the overall quality of ECEC conclude that this is an under developed area and should be the direction of future research.

#### **8.5.1.5 Moral and ideological tensions and children’s rights**

As has discussed earlier, China has a long cultural heritage influenced by the the hierarchical relationship among people as a core value of Confucianism’s Five Codes of Ethics, Wu Lun (the relationship between: ruler/subject, father/son, husband/wife, older brother/younger brother, and friends’). Pet et al 2018 describing the Chinese cultural heritage note that:

*the collectivist orientation which stresses the priority of group goals over individual goals*



*and the importance of cohesion within social groups. Children in traditional culture were treated as the hope of family and future of country, and the value of children was defined by the profits of family and future, and the subjectivity of children as individuals is ignored. (p. 601).*

Within this tradition obedience and discipline and respect of authority have been core values of child upbringing practices among parents and teachers. For example, studies on corporal punishment conclude that this type of punishment remains the most common practice among many Chinese parents for implementing discipline (Qiao and Chan 2005, Kuan 2011, Goh 2011, Qiao and Xie 2015, Xiong 2015). A qualitative study conducted in northern rural China showed that physical punishment was valued as the most effective way of disciplining children by parents, teachers and caregivers (Katz et al 2011).

However, as mentioned earlier, after the open door policy there was a shift towards modernising China and with the government's agenda for quality in education a view of a child being autonomous and independent was promoted. Alongside with the ratification of United Nations Convention on the Rights of Child (UNCRC) on 29th of August 1990, tensions among modern ideas of a scientific child upbringing practices and implementation of children's rights and traditional rooted values underlie any discussions of quality. For example, in UNCRC it is stated: "States Parties recognize that every child has the inherent right to life. States Parties shall ensure to the maximum extent possible the survival and development of the child" (UNCRC 1989). This article is in direct conflict with the One Child Policy which resulted in China to reserve its rights to the UNCRC in order to be able to continue the family planning policy.

(Chinese Human Rights Defenders, Information Submitted to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, Nov.29, 2012, [http://www.crin.org/docs/China\\_Chinese%20Human%20Rights%20Defenders\\_CRC%20Report.pdf](http://www.crin.org/docs/China_Chinese%20Human%20Rights%20Defenders_CRC%20Report.pdf)).

At policy level there is a promotion of children being able to become independent- minded learners, with parents and teachers being advised to create opportunities for children to become creative and autonomous thinkers with publications such as the 2000 best-selling volume *Suzhi jiaoyu zai Meiguo* [Education for Quality in the US] (Waronov 2007, Naftali 2014). Moreover, with the introduction of laws for the protection of the rights of minors and protection of the interests of young in China (Naftali 2009, p. 82) as well as the right to protection from acts that humiliate the

personal dignity of the child such as physical abuse and the right to privacy (geren yinsi) (China. Org.cn. 2015) the government has shown commitment in raising quality in children's lives and their education (Zhang 2013). Children's rights are now taught in primary schools. Pen et al (2018), examined the relevant literature in the Chinese language, and concluded that although there are now teachers in many classrooms that try to listen to children's voices, allow time for free play and give children more chances to make their own plan and choice, more research and work is needed in that sector to extend these practices. To sum up, although there are the intentions at a policy level to implement these new ideas and children's rights and practices towards that direction emerge, the actual practices differ. Rights such as survival, protection, developmental, access to education and participation are endangered by issues such as child labour, trafficking of children and traditional beliefs on physical punishment and children's participation in all aspects that concerns them.

## **8.6 Teacher education and professional development:**

This section of the review engages with literature relating to teacher education and professional development of both pre- and post-service teachers. Literature related to routes for initial teacher education, continuous professional development opportunities and leadership routes are explored in order to illuminate the current Chinese social, economic and cultural context.

### **8.6.1 Policy context: staff and training expectations**

Although staff qualifications requirements in mainland China for ECEC teachers have increased over the last two decades, this still remains a national priority, yet challenging in terms of implementation (Qui and Melhuish 2017).

In order to support curriculum reform, and development of practices in Chinese kindergarten settings, for the past two decades government initiatives have attempted to build teacher capacity through both pre- and in-service training. In 1989 the Regulations on the Management of Kindergartens (MOE 1989a) specified that kindergarten leaders and teachers who had not graduated from a recognised teacher training school would have to pass an examination, with the Kindergarten Work Regulations of the same year specifying that kindergarten teachers should hold accredited teacher certification (MOE 1989b).

With early childhood development now an educational priority in mainland China, as shown earlier, statistics regarding the distribution of teachers portray a stark contrast between urban and

underprivileged rural areas, where a challenge continues to be the provision of an adequate number of qualified kindergarten teachers (Li et al 2015).

Rural kindergartens were targeted due to the disparity of provision between rural and urban areas, and consequently nearly all teachers in non-urban contexts receiving in-service training (Qui and Melhuish 2017). Pilot projects in 2011 set out an implementation programme which emphasised specifically the education and training of rural kindergarten directors and master teachers with professional development activities (Hong and Chen 2017).

Official statistics support an increased proportion of serving headteachers and teachers with higher academic qualifications, with 69.4 per cent holding a 3 or 4 year degree in 2013, up from 32 per cent in 2001 (MOE 2001, MOE 2013). Even so, this increase does not reveal the impact of these higher qualifications on both kindergarten practices, staffing and outcomes for children (Qui and Melhuish 2017). More recent research has called for standardised staff training and qualification expectations, which are regulated to assure quality across settings (Qui and Melhuish 2017).

The special administrative region of Hong Kong context of pre-primary education has faced similar challenges historically in receiving minimal government investment. Having previously been seen as the ‘Cinderella of education system’, pre-primary education has been a focus of major reform. In order to obtain a government subsidy as a non-profit making kindergarten, criteria must be met which include the minimum qualifications for teachers being a Certificate of Early Childhood Education (Yang et al 2017, p. 53). In 2014/15 98 per cent of teachers and principals in the Hong Kong had obtained, or were enrolled on, a Certificate in ECE (Committee of Free Kindergarten Education 2017).

### **8.6.2 Early Years Teacher workforce: status and conditions**

Whilst teaching has historically been a respected career in mainland China, there still needs to be increased clarity related to the regulations, recognition and status of kindergarten teachers, alongside a standardised salary system (Li et al 2015, Li et al 2017). The early years’ workforce in China is still seen as a female based domain, accentuated by the low socio-economic status of EYE teachers which impacts of the cultural view that men should be the main wage earners (Xu and Waniganayake 2018). This has resulted in the early years workforce being perceived as holding lower status than later grades teachers, and this has been accompanied by low pay, lesser

and non-standardised entry qualifications, disparity between the quality of training institutions and non-cohesive pre and post training systems (Li et al 2015). With quality of early years provision a major priority in terms of government policy and initiatives, the government has been urged to standardise and upgrade the kindergartens teachers' license system and improve salaries and conditions in order to develop a skilled workforce. With quality a global topic of debate, monitoring staff quality has become a driving initiative globally and impacted upon policy making worldwide (OECD 2015).

A more balanced gender workforce has been seen in recent years as a way of raising both quality and status of the early years' workforce in China. The gender disparity of practitioners in early years education, with the workforce being predominantly female, is a worldwide trend. This is also replicated in the Chinese context, where men only make up 2 per cent of pre-school teachers (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China's 2014). Although there is much research on the global participation of men in EYE there may be specific reasoning behind this in the Chinese context, particularly in relation to widely held cultural and gender based and stereotypical values (Xu and Waniganayake 2018). As a result, few men select early years as their focus in university choice. Some provincial Chinese governments have attempted to implement policies to encourage men into the profession (Jiangsu Education 2014, MENTEACH 2015). In the Shanghai context, for example, initiatives have encouraged students to change their specialised focus at undergraduate level to early years education, as well as build an open and culturally-diverse training system through the recruitment of male students (Li Lui and Fan 2017).

Government initiatives, alongside workshops, seminars and training programmes for all stakeholders, in addition to student teachers, have the potential to have impact upon the changing perceptions of parents, administrators and the wider public in valuing the role of early childhood educators and their identities and as well as to support changes in the mind-set of the general public in acknowledging the value of gender diversity within the ECEC workforce (Zhang and Yu 2017, Xu and Waniganayake 2018). Alongside these policy developments, there are clear implications for teacher education initiatives. Early childhood teachers should be supported in their development as reflective professionals who recognise the value of their career as well as their impact on the outcomes of young children (Zhang and Yu 2017).

Recent research comparing the perspectives of Australian and Chinese early years teachers identified that they were not surprisingly underpinned by attitudes reflecting their own socio-cultural

and cultural contexts (Li et al 2017, Pan et al 2018). China has been strongly influenced by international concepts, particularly in terms of early years pedagogy and the globalisation of higher education (Li et al 2017). Chinese early years teachers displayed a strong sense of group belonging, with high importance given to the social context of learning and the research called upon government policy to build upon these issues as domains of inquiry within the government reform initiative (Li et al 2017).

### **8.6.3 Chinese National Curriculum Standards: ECEC**

In 2010 issues related to strengthening teacher capacity was highlighted as one of the 10 kindergarten educational priorities. One of these 10 initiatives was identified as strengthening the early years workforce by ensuring that there was an adequate supply of early years teachers in both national and local standards (Li, Liu and Fan 2017). In order to support this, pre-school teacher qualifications should be standardised, with the provision of the same benefits whether teaching in private or public sectors in order to support the implementation of consistent training systems (State Council 2010).

To support this initiative, as mentioned earlier, the Kindergarten Teachers Standards were introduced in 2011 and 2012, in addition to in service training programmes from 2012-2015. To facilitate the general reform of ECEC, one of the six areas of development recognised was continued teacher development and education, including credentialing and training as well as teacher benefits (Hong and Chen 2017). The 2011 standards outlined the skills which should be achieved during initial teacher education and this was built upon in the 2012 documentation which delineated 62 areas of expertise in which students and serving teachers should show competence. Overarching features of the standards are the social, cultural contexts underpinning Chinese society (Li et al 2017). As was shown earlier, within the curriculum standards national guidelines were established to support training by both pre-services colleges and universities, identifying 6 modules which should be integrated into training. The six modules are: (1) child development and learning; (2) the foundations of child pedagogy; (3) child activity and guidance; (4) kindergarten, family and society; (5) professional ethics and professional development, and (6) practicum and field studies (MOE 2011).

### **8.6.4 The context of Initial Teacher Education**

With the government development of early years provision, the accompanying demand for a qualified workforce have resulted in pre-service training institutions increasing the numbers of

admissions. However, this has not necessarily achieved the goal of strengthening quality of early years' provision through the qualifications of the workforce (Li, Lui and Fan 2017). This has also been accompanied by the challenge of upgrading the initial teacher education routes to complement the reforms in terms of in-service teachers in terms of qualifications, licensing and registration (Lui, Lui and Fan 2017).

In terms of pre-service training, or initial teacher education (ITE), there are primarily three routes to teaching in mainland China; upper secondary schools can qualify teachers for kindergarten and primary positions by awarding a high school diploma; normal colleges can train lower secondary teachers for an additional two years following the high school diploma; normal universities can award with a four year Bachelors programme, and this is mainly a route for upper secondary teachers. In 2009, 81.76 per cent of kindergarten teachers were educated in special upper secondary schools on diploma programmes (MOE 2012).

The variety of teacher training institutions has resulted in large numbers of candidates for initial teacher training participating in training at secondary school level, which ultimately does not raise the professionalism of the workforce and results in a surplus of unqualified teachers (Li et al 2015). Having historically lacked academic rigour, the education of teachers at technical secondary school level is often focused on the arts, with limited engagement with educational pedagogy or theory (Pang, Wang and LI 2018). Adding to this complexity, large numbers of non-normal secondary and upper secondary schools now participating in initial teacher education, has resulted in many normal colleges in lowering enrolment standards in order to survive (Li et al 2005).

Table 4. Kindergarten teachers training in different academic levels (Li et al, 2015: 137)

	School types	Number of graduates	Enrolment	Students On Campus
Undergraduate Level	Normal universities	80	2,950	17,206
	Others	89	2,136	15,859
	Total	169	5,086	33,065
College level	Normal universities	48	3,636	15,425

	Normal colleges	35	7,038	17,502
	Others	200	17,524	53,239
	Total	283	28,198	86,166
Secondary school level	Special upper secondary schools	117	65,633	158,359
	Others	2,182	226,495	542,089
	Total	2,299	292,128	700,448
Total		2,751	332,445	819,679

(Source: Adapted from Teacher Education Office, Ministry of Education, 2012)

As a result, kindergarten teacher ITE has become increasingly polarised, with normal universities focusing on academic and theoretical skills, with limited engagement with practice, in direct contrast with upper secondary schools focusing on skills of teaching with limited engagement with professionalism. What is currently problematic, as illustrated in table 9.2, is the shortage of highly qualified and excess of unqualified teachers in pre-primary education (Li et al 2015).

### 8.6.5 In Service teachers contexts: progression and measurement

The Pre School Job Directive Rules of 2016 outline the roles of pre-school teachers as: *‘providing and implementing an education work plan, establishing the learning environment, guiding and cooperating with childcare workers, keeping in touch with parents, participating in vocational study and research activities on care and education, and evaluating the outcomes of child care and education’* (Wang and Ho 2018: 7). The quality and status of kindergarten teachers in China is measured, not just by the highest standard of professional qualifications, but is also based upon years of experience and performative evaluations in settings:

*In China, a Professional Title system called ‘Zhi Cheng’ is implemented in education system to indicate teachers’ professional levels. The titles directly relate to teachers’ income, job stability and career opportunities. Teachers can achieve higher titles through increasing their working experience and taking tests” (Song et al 2014, p. 364). tests” (Song et al 2014, p. 364).*

There are five formal hierarchical stages for serving kindergarten teachers: 1. novice teachers who then become third grade teachers; 2. second grade or intermediate teachers; 3. first-grade or advanced teachers; 4. senior-grade, and 5. master teachers (Li, Lui and Fan 2017). Teachers are upgraded to the next stage incrementally following each 5 years of service, in addition to a setting-based evaluation at Stage 1, and a setting and district evaluation at Stage 2. Senior grade teachers play a critical role in local kindergartens, with master teachers having many years' experience at a 'grass roots level' and assessed as being outstanding teachers and leaders (Li, Lui and Fan 2017). Career progression is mainly conducted through performative teaching demonstrations and competitions (Guo, Liang and Yan 2013). A select number of master teachers are selected to become Super-grade Teachers (Teji jiaoshi) and this is a prestigious position for which very few are selected. For example, in Beijing 2009, only five master teachers were designated as being Super-grade Teachers (Li, Lui and Fan 2017). There are also inconsistencies with this system, with many teachers in rural areas or private contexts not accessing 'Zhi Cheng' due to the vagueness of the title and lack of clarity in terms of criteria for achievement (Song et al, 2014).

#### **8.6.6 Recent Initiatives: In service training and CPD**

Both historical and recent national policy has addressed the need for serving teachers in terms of training and professional development (Li, Lui and Fan 2017). The Teacher Law of 1993 set out the boundaries for teacher education alongside the recognition of teaching as a profession, establishing conditions of employment such as rights and the monitoring of quality (Guo, Liang and Yan 2013). The Parameter for Teacher Education in 2002, set down the explicit stages of a teacher's professional development in terms of progression (Guo, Liang and Yan 2013). In June 2010, the National Teacher Training Programme (NTTP) was implemented by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Finance, which was an initiative to improve the overall quality of teachers at all grades, with a particular emphasis on those teachers working in rural schools (MOE 2010).

A component of the NTTP was the Project of Exemplary Teacher Training (PETT) and the Project of Rural Key Teacher Training in central and western China (PRKTT). Within this initiative a project budget solely for kindergarten teachers was set at 1.1 billion RMB, and within the first round in implementing the programme training was facilitated for 9.18 million rural kindergarten teachers (MOE 2014a, b). The NTTP has been adapted and enhanced in different ways at regional level in order to employ an adequate supply of teachers with enhanced training and professional qualifications (Li, Lui and Fan 2017). The Jiangxi province has developed the "Target Training to



Primary and Secondary School Teachers in Rural Areas Program”, which supports teacher graduates from 3 year programmes and five year specialist kindergarten teachers to work in rural areas of deprivation, with the Xinjiang province implementing a bilingual pre-school teacher staff education programme (Li, Lui and Fan 2017). Other regions are planning to implement and expand this type of training across their areas, and the MOE plans to increase the number of kindergarten teachers to 1 million over the next three years (MOE 2015). In research by Guo, Liang and Yan, serving teachers identified the NNTP as the policy with the most impact of practice in that:

*First, it provided a step-by-step approach. Second, it emphasized a differentiated way of development with different learning goals set for teachers in different professional ranks. Third, it had a cooperative focus that learning was shared between experienced and less experienced teachers: (2013: 92).*

However, an obstacle encountered by Early Years Directors in implementation at a ‘grass roots’ level, is the conflict between ‘collective’ teaching methodology and the more developmental child-centred approach to learning and teaching (Fan, Nyland, and Nyland 2016).

### **8.6.7 Leadership: Policy and development**

In the context of mainland China, in addition to setting the expectations for teachers, a directive of the 1989 Kindergarten Work Regulations (MOE 1989b) was a required upgrade for kindergarten leaders to have work experience and have completed authorised leadership training. Within the Hong Kong context, accompanying the introduction of the pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme (PEVS) in 2007, legislation has made it mandatory that all new kindergarten principals also hold a Bachelor Degree in Early Childhood Education, met prescribed standards of early years contextual experience and completed a KG Principals Certification Programme (Yang et al 2017). In 2014/15 92 per cent of Hong Kong principals had obtained, or were in the process of completing, a B Ed (Committee of Free Kindergarten Education 2017). Research conducted by Fan, Nyland, and Nyland (2016), found that kindergarten directors from rural areas viewed themselves as more confident in supporting child care in their settings than child development, citing their lack of training in early childhood education theory and methodology. The resulting implications are that pre-school leaders do not always have pedagogical leadership skills to support curriculum design or effective resource implementation (Pan, Yang and Li 2018).

In relation to understanding surrounding leadership practices, recent research by Yang (2019) suggests that there are substantial disparities in the perception of early childhood leadership

contexts in China. Previous studies have suggested that culture and society have a particularly significant impact on leadership behaviours within the Chinese context, with practices characterised by Confucianism, collectivism and communism (Tam 2018; Wang and Ho 2018). Consequently, school leaders have a high level of authority and, underpinned by the societal norms related to leadership, this poses challenges to pre-school leaders in developing models of distributed leadership within their schools as well as supporting teachers develop leadership responsibilities outside of their classrooms (Wang and Ho 2018). With government policy innovations often assigned to a regional level in terms of interpretation, pre-school leaders have taken much responsibility in terms of the implementation of early childhood curriculum reforms, thus having a critical role in the challenges faced in applying new innovations to practice, but with limited mentoring support (Yang 2019).

Tam's research, situated in the Hong Kong context, cites the tensions between the hierarchical concept of leadership and the overarching features of distributed leadership being based on the development of equal relationships between leaders and colleagues, and concludes:

*Well-educated and well-trained professionals are key elements in providing high-quality early childhood education. Since the results suggest that the level of education and professional development of leaders are likely to affect their style of leadership, the policymakers are advised to formulate policy to upgrade teachers and principals to degree and higher-degree holders respectively, especially in leadership education. Policymakers are also responsible for giving a clear definition of change before initiating a new form of leadership to avoid misunderstandings (Tam 2018:15).*

Yang's study highlighted how there has been limited academic research related to early childhood leadership in the Chinese context, and illuminated the stages, roles and characteristics of curriculum leadership and management explicitly within the context of Chinese pre-schools (Table 5).

Table 5 . Early Childhood Curriculum Leadership in Chinese contexts: stages, roles and critical events

Stages	Roles	Critical events
Beginning	Critical reviewer Vision builder	Equipping with curriculum awareness Leading the curriculum notions Questioning, borrowing and planning
Implementation	Resource manager	Transplanting, tailoring and integration

	Teacher supporter	Establishing the professional learning community Constructing the curriculum repository Educating and receiving parental support
Reflection	Quality monitor Guide of curriculum formation	Assuring curriculum quality and teacher aut Establishing the school-based curriculum system

(Source: Adopted by Yang, W. (2019) Moving from imitation to innovation: Exploring a Chinese model of early childhood curriculum leadership. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood* Vol. 20(1) 35-52)

Yang's research promotes a model that should include “*continuous negotiations between solo and shared leadership forms*’ in line with previous research by Chan, situated in Hong Kong, who maintained that pre school leaders should be able to adopt a mix of leadership styles in order to promote both children outcomes and oraganzational results” (Yang 2019: 48; Chan 2014).

### 8.6.8 Initial teacher education

In order to address the shortage of highly qualified new kindergarten teachers, students need to be attracted at college and university levels, with the accompanying initiative of decreasing students accessing early years teacher status through high school diplomas, with Li, Deng and Lui making the following proposals:

*To solve the problem of shortage of kindergarten teachers, a group of normal colleges of pre-primary education should be built, increasing enrolment in pre-primary major education students on the condition of expanding schools with free-educated normal students. The plan of local schools with free-educated normal students should be in accordance with the recruitment and training policies of central or co-constructing schools to promote the construction of pre-primary education professions in special upper secondary schools and enlarge the enrolment (2015, p. 138).*

It has been proposed that teacher preparation should be innovative in calling upon a more evidence based approach to support the use of teaching strategies which promote creative learning experiences, with opportunity for education students and graduates to engage in self and peer assessment before they begin their classroom career as the sole teacher (Ying, Dieker, Yang and Yang 2016).

### 8.6.9 In service training and professional development

With overwhelming evidence that early years teachers with high qualifications impact not only upon enabling environments, but also better outcomes for children (Litjens and Taguma 2010), the

literature reviewed has proposed that, in order to ensure better outcomes for children, cohesive and continuing government policies to strengthen the capacity of the workforce are required to facilitate high quality kindergarten environments (Li, Lui and Fan 2017).

In terms of the professional development of serving teachers it is evident that through the development of kindergarten policies and ‘grass roots’ initiatives recent Chinese governments have been making clear attempts to improve the teaching in early childhood settings and this had been welcomed by serving teachers (Guo, Liang and Yan 2013). However, it is suggested that teachers’ career progression and evaluation should be more aligned to the learning of children, as opposed to the focus upon teacher performance and hierarchical status (Guo, Ling and Yan 2013). This would support the progression and evaluation of teachers being more aligned to the outcomes of children within a climate of evidence-based practice which implements coaching and mentoring at its core, but also connects research with practice (Ying, Dieker, Yang and Yang 2016).

The policy of the government in encouraging regional areas to develop and prioritise their own reforms in the light of central policy, has led to some inconsistent and unequal developments. This does pose challenges in terms of promoting a consistent message regarding the purpose of early years education and critical features for development (Fan, Nyland and Nyland 2016).

It is additionally recommended that continuous professional development for serving early years teachers provide opportunities for serving teachers to have the opportunity to respond in terms of their views and needs regarding policy development, in order to minimise inconsistency between government goals and practical application in terms of teacher experiences (Guo, Liang and Yan 2013). Furthermore, this will support teachers in reflecting upon their identities in early childhood education, drawing upon their teaching and learning experiences, to support them in the development as reflective early years professionals (Zhang and Yu 2017).

## 8.7 Parents

Searching for published work on parents in China, it was found that there is a plethora of research (published in English and Chinese) that examines family structures, parenting styles, parents’ beliefs on play and learning, parental involvement and engagement in their children’s education.

### 8.7.1 Family structures

In their study, based on large samples and official statistics, Chen et al (2019) conclude that in contemporary China the traditional family structure remains dominant even while most families have had to comply with the national family planning of the One Child Policy which recently has

been relaxed. Family structures traditionally have been rigid and hierarchical with respect for the elders. With the One Child Policy it is common now among many families that the parents and four grandparents to raise one child.

Due to the imbalanced socioeconomic growth between rural and urban areas, tens of millions of adults have migrated across regions for job opportunities and yet still bound by the *hukou* system (Chen et al 2019). *Hukou* is a registration system that officially identifies the residential area for the Chinese citizens and includes information such as date of birth, parents' names and spouse (Wang et al 2017). Chen et al (2019), reporting on the CFPS data of 2010, note that 13 per cent of Chinese children did not live with their parents and 15 per cent lived with only one parent at home. “*The left behind children with no parent at home-often left in the care of grandparents who tend to be less educated and in frail health-are especially at a developmental disadvantage*” (Chen et al 2019, p. 67). Research has shown that the left-behind children are raised by a demographic that is typically less educated, less healthy and older in age and are more likely to suffer developmentally (Wu, Young and Chai 2012, Khor et al 2016, Luo et al 2017). For example, Wei et al. (2015) showed that depression is common among caregivers and subsequently the children in their care have less opportunities for learning. Similarly, Yue et al. (2017) study how rural caregivers in Shaanxi province interacted with toddlers and find that interactive parenting is rare.

Due to the registration system (*hukou*), it is still difficult for rural migrant workers without urban registration to enjoy equal rights and have access to the same public services as urban residents (Song et al 2014). Migrant workers are also on the lower rungs of the income ladder and their children either do not have access to public ECEC or to poor quality ECEC, therefore, resulting to widening the educational gap (Wang et al 207).

### 8.7.2 Parenting styles

An extensive body of research has focused on examining parenting styles in relation to children's development, wellbeing and educational outcomes (e.g. Lin Hui and Yang 2019, chen 2018, Lin and Li 2018, Xie and Li 2018, Huang et al 2017, Li and Xie 2017, Hu, Zhou and Li 2017, Hu, Zhou and Li 2017, Chen, Chen and Zheng 2012). Parenting style refers to “*a constellation of attitudes toward the child that are communicated to the child and create an emotional climate in which the parent's behaviours are expressed*” (Darling & Steinberg, 1993, p. 493).

As mentioned earlier, the Chinese society has been heavily influenced by Confucian traditions and this is mirrored in the family's values and beliefs. Central to the Confucian tradition is the ethic of filial piety that guides child rearing practices. Filial precepts include “*obeying and honouring one's parents,[...] and in general conducting oneself so as to bring honour and not disgrace to the family name*” (Ho, 1994, p. 287). Huang et al 2017 examined the associations between parents' styles in association to educational outcomes in three different countries and explain that traditionally, listening and respecting adults, following rules, self-monitoring and being sensitive to other people's evaluations and criticism are key expectations for Chinese children. Deeply rooted to child rearing practice is the idea that the responsibility and obligation of parents is to train, to discipline, to make children sensitive to the social rules and to feel ashamed when they fail to obey them (Chao, 1994; Lieber, Fung, & Leung, 2006). Li and Xie (2017). This is a view that has been supported by others (e.g. Luo et al 2017) who add that typically a “*a stick parenting*” authoritarian and authoritative approach have been advocated in the Chinese society. The research examined in this review are using western approaches and typologies of parental styles, however, with critics (e.g. Huang et al 2017) arguing that Chinese parenting styles cannot be fully captured using these. In an earlier study, for example, Chao (1994) identified an indigenous Chinese parenting dimension, “*training*” (chiao shun), which involves training children early through guidance and continuous monitoring of their behaviours, while providing care, concern, support, and parental involvement (Chao, 1994).

Although the consensus among the researchers is that Chinese parenting tends to be more authoritarian and authoritative, Xu et al 2005 (in their research examining parental interactions with their children) found that due to exposure to western ideas and culture Chinese parents' styles are changing and becoming more warm and interacting with their children with affection and love.

Research attention (e.g. Li and Xie 2017, Xie and Li 2018) is paid on ‘*tiger parenting*’. Xie and Li (2018) explain that this was since the publication of the book: *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother* that advocated that Asian American children have better educational outcomes and achievements when raised by strict Chinese parents. This view has been contested by many researchers (e.g. Cheah, Leung and Zhou 2013, Kim et al 2013, Xie and Li 2018), however, who have provided empirical evidence that tiger parenting actually is associated with lower educational achievements and lower academic performance in children. Xie and Li (2018) in their study on parenting styles in relation to school readiness of pre-school children found :

*That easygoing parenting profile was associated with better outcomes when it involved a combination of easygoing mother and supportive father or tiger father, but not when it involved two easygoing parents. This conformed to the division of parental roles in traditional Chinese society: Stern father and compassionate mother (嚴父慈母), that at least one parent should be either strict with or supportive of the child. This has been the mainstay of Chinese families for thousands of years and has been the social and cultural underpinnings of Chinese society. Additionally, the Confucian definition of fatherhood in traditional China was the authority and head of the family (Ho, 1987), with the paternal role established as an educator-disciplinarian in addition to a provider (Ho, 1981). Therefore, it was not surprising to find that easygoing parents were associated with worse outcome in children when compared to a combination of easygoing mother and non-easygoing father, because parents who are both laissez-faire do not play an active parental role, which might not benefit their children's academic learning. (p.1827).*

There are also fewer emerging studies on parenting in rural China (Luo et al 2017, Li et al 2017, Luo et al 2015, Wei et al 2015) that portray concerning trends. As in rural areas many children have left behind to grandparents and caregivers the parenting qualities are not always positive or parenting knowledge is minimal.

To conclude, research examined here suggests that there is an increasing interest of scholars in terms of the impact of parenting on the educational outcomes and achievements of children. The research suggests that there is a myth that tiger parenting results in better outcomes and that parents that adopt an encouraging approach of their children in the family affairs, providing guidance and support, is associated with better educational outcomes and school readiness. Finally, research suggest that research should examine culturally appropriate approaches to examine parenting attitudes and attributes, conduct research at homes and in different regions. Also, as the generation of the One Child Policy is approaching their 30s research is needed to find out their views as a “new generation” towards parenting. Finally it should be noted there are limited studies examining parents attitudes towards children with disabilities or learning difficulties and yet in China according to the 2001 survey, over 25,000 children are born per year with some type of disability (Zheng et al 2016).



### 8.7.3 Parents' beliefs on play and learning

As discussed in section 8.5.1.2 Chinese parents value study rather than play and there is a decrease in children's play time and structured after school activities with emphasis on children acquiring as many skills from an early stage in order to be well equipped for future employment. Recent studies that examined parents' beliefs on play at home (e.g. Chen et al 2019, Lin and Li 2019, Lin and Wang 2019, Li and Chen 2017), alongside past studies (Rao and Li 2009, Rao, Ng and Pearson 2010), have found that parents who engage with their children from a very young age in activities think it will help them with their academic skills. Rao and Li (2009) found that Chinese parents prefer to practice "eduplay". Lin and Yang (2019) in their qualitative research on play and learning explain:

*Chinese parents traditionally believed in a dichotomy between play and learning. For several centuries, China's educational and examination system emphasized the recitation of Confucian classics, such as the Four Books and Five Classics (四書五經), as essential content for succeeding on the rigorous civil service examination. The exam-based tradition discouraged play because it diverted children away from serious learning. Moreover, the image of children as malleable clay strengthened the idea of playing as nonbeneficial. The Three-Character Classics (三字經) nicely illustrated the emphasis on educating children through harsh discipline and formal training:*

*Jade that has not been polished cannot be used. A person that has not been trained cannot know righteousness (玉不琢，不成器；人不學，不知義)... Reward lies ahead of diligence, but nothing is gained by indolence (勤有功，戲無益) (Wang 1223-1296)" (p.84).*

This Chinese tradition which highly values discipline, conformity and academic achievement has side-lined free play in favour of activities such as reading, alphabetic learning, arithmetic (Li and Chen 2017, Rao et al 2018a and b). Chinese parents' favour skills development activities that will improve their children's educational outcomes as the idea of play is associated with leisure. Despite the progressive ideas that have started shaping the modern China, the play-learning divide still exists among Chinese parents. Play is considered important for children's development, but not for their academic preparation (e.g. Lin and Yawkey, 2013; Yi and Yang, 2003). Therefore, the concept of "eduplay", a synthesis of play and early academic learning rather than a division between them, has now gaining interest among Chinese parents especially in the Coastal areas (Lin 2013 Lin and Li, 2018b, Rao and Li 2009). In Rao and Li's (2009) case study, for instance, Chinese mothers embraced the academic value of play and believed that early literacy and arithmetic concepts could be learned through it. A large-scale survey conducted in coastal China (Lin and Li 2018a) indicated that the academic learning of very young children through adult-directed play was a unique and important construct underlying Chinese parents' play beliefs. Lin



and Li (2018a) and found two patterns of parental engagement in children's play. Parent involvement mediated the relationship between their play for learning beliefs and children's engagement with (pre)academic related play, but did not mediate the relationships between play for fun. This indicated that they see their role as teachers for play for learning, but not themselves as playmates in the play for fun. They also found that there are three main profiles of Chinese mothers (a) a structured profile, fitting those who ascribed high value to eduplay, but low value to free play; (b) an unstructured profile, fitting those who ascribed high value to free play, but low value to eduplay; and (c) a structured-unstructured profile, fitting those who valued eduplay and free play equally and highly. Lin and Yang (2019) conclude that *"[t]he inconsistent findings on how Chinese parents perceive and value play suggest that Chinese parents have their own views and agendas that may be complex and sometimes conflict with those promoted by ECE policymakers and educators"* (p. 84).

Lin and Li (2019) found parents engaged more frequently in play with toddlers for educational purposes, further confirming Chinese parents' preference for educational play or 'eduplay'. However, Lin and Li also found that parents played with their toddlers in different ways, such as fantasy play, entertainment, and rough-and-tumble play, suggesting that sociocultural changes (e.g open door and expose to western ideas, urbanisation, economic growth, one child policy) have brought changes on the way parents are starting seeing playing with their children. Research also suggests that these changes have led to increased expectations connected to parental responsibilities and more equal social participation among parents with very young children (Lin, Li, and Yang, 2018).

#### **8.7.4 Parents involvement and engagement in ECEC**

As was seen above and in the section on Study and play, Chinese parents value learning and education. There is clear evidence that Chinese have been highly involved in their children's ECEC. Chen et al (2019,) using as indicators educational activities such as read a book to the child or buy a book to the children, report that an increase from 2010 to 2014 between parents and caregivers that were actively involved in their children education (e.g. read a book =rural 62.7 per cent, urban 77.6 per cent, and buying a child a book =rural 45.8 per cent, urban 63.0 per cent). They found that among urban parents there is a higher proportion of parental involvement compare to the rural areas. However, they stress that there was a significant increase in the involvement of rural parents and caregivers in the ECEC of their children in 2014 due to the expansion of ECEC in rural areas. They also report that although there is an increase in caregivers of left behind children

involvement in rural areas, the gap between caregiver involvement and parental involvement remained considerable for children in different living arrangements.

However, we have been unable to find any publications in English that research parental involvement or engagement or partnerships with ECEC.

The studies reviewed in this article have revealed some problems and challenges that need to be addressed in order to improve the effectiveness of assessment in ECE in China. There are two problems related to the concepts and aspects of assessment in ECE. First, assessment in ECE has been defined similarly in the Chinese speaking literature. However, the concept tends to be unspecific. It would be useful if assessment in ECE could be defined more clearly and consistently in future research and practice, particularly in terms of the relationship between the quality of ECE and child development. Second, more research is needed to understand the key aspects of assessment and their relative roles in assessment. It is known that process quality is valuable, yet the role of structural quality and outcome quality remains a disputed issue.

With regard to the elements of assessment in ECE, there remain three challenges. First, due to the diversity of participants who are involved in the process of assessment, such as policymakers, managers, teachers, researchers, children, and parents, different opinions need to be recognised and respected. Inspectors with different perspectives such as researchers and educational practitioners would make joint efforts to improve the effectiveness of assessment. Second, there is no unified set of assessment standards of ECE providers across different cities and provinces in China. Whether it is realistic and reliable to develop a set of assessment standards to be adopted in ECE in China has to be explored in the future. Third, highly reliable and valid assessment instruments are in great need. Although some tools have been adapted from standardised English measures, it is necessary to develop reliable, valid, and culturally and linguistically appropriate assessment tools that can be easily accessed and used in different ECE settings in the Chinese context. Furthermore, most existing assessment instruments are designed for kindergartens mainly with 3-6-year-olds. Very few assessment tools, if any, are available to examine nurseries with 0-3-year-olds or other types of ECE providers. It is hoped that this review can serve as a starting point for further research and practice aiming at improving the assessment in ECE in China.

## 9. KEY FINDINGS

The key findings from the literature review are presented under each theme of the scope of this literature review and in line with the aims and objectives of the Centre for Teacher and Early Years Education in China:

- Teacher education for the early years in China
- Quality in early years education
- Early literacy development
- Family and parental education

Overall, examining available publications in English, we noted that there is an increase of research examining ECEC in Chinese and English. ECEC development in China has experienced rapid changes and at a government level and there is a commitment to improve ECEC for all young children nationwide. Research has been examining teacher's development, what constitutes quality, how different ideas mainly borrowed from the Western world can be married with traditional Chinese values, how children's rights can effectively be implemented and effective ways of teaching to read and write the complex Chinese language. Despite all these attempts the imbalanced socioeconomic growth of China has left the country with disparities between the rural and urban regions. ECEC development in China faces challenges in terms of the distribution of funding, how public and private organisations can work effectively together to provide high quality ECEC, how the under developed 0-3 years services can be improved and how to develop and train ECEC teachers so they can embrace effective pedagogical practices in their classrooms. There are also concerns about the social and economic inequalities and how these might impact on children's long term educational achievements. Research tries to examine all these issues but it has become obvious from this literature review that further investigations is required so it can inform policy and practice.

### 9.1 Teacher education for the early years in China

It has become evident from the literature review that in terms of the teacher education although there is some progress and teachers now are starting having better education and training, still there are many areas that under developed and more research is required towards improving teacher education for ECEC. These are:

- In service and preservice training in regards to the developmental needs of the teachers in ECEC. There is an inconsistency between initial teacher education programmes, both in terms of quality and content. It is proposed that future initiatives should address the shortage of highly qualified new kindergarten teachers by attracting students at college and university levels. Teachers are asked to work with modern western ideas such as play based pedagogy, playful learning, child centered approach where autonomous and independent learning are promoted. However, as shown throughout this review this is in conflict with the rooted Chinese traditions of collective teaching methods. Thus, it is suggested that there is a need to develop research evidence based training that it is culturally appropriate and sensitive and the traditional values are mapped and integrated with the vast body of international research in ECEC that has play based approached core to in caring and educating young children.
- ECEC teacher evaluation and career progression should be more aligned to the outcomes of children in order to embed these principles of evidence based practice. School leaders are often expected to interpret government initiatives at a local level. In order to develop capacity to support curriculum design, it is proposed that the qualifications of ECEC Directors should be unlevelled to degree status and include leadership education. Societal norms regarding leadership perceptions pose challenges to school leaders in establishing models of distributed leadership, so consideration needs to be given in how to support ECEC leaders in developing a mix of leadership styles appropriate to the Chinese cultural context.
- Research based training is also required in relation to how to care and educate children from 0- 3 years here is a lack of specialised teachers for this age group and it will be welcomed to find more on how teachers are trained to work this age group.
- As migration is a key issue in contemporary Chinese society, further investigation is required on teachers' beliefs and attitudes towards children from migrant families. It will also be important to explore how grandparents and caregivers can be supported to provide better quality of care and education for children left behind.

## 9.2 Quality in early years education

The socio-economic disparities between urban and rural areas hinders the quality of provision in ECEC. Although there are many achievements in raising the standards of ECEC , there is still more work that is need informed by mainly large scale research that is needed. From the literature review discussed here further research is needed in the following areas. However, it is important to be

noted that research has to be culturally appropriate and sensitive. Therefore it is suggested that research needs to focus on:

- Exploring how Chinese values and constructions of childhood (especially conformity versus autonomy) can be integrated in the ECEC curriculum. There is consensus in the research examined here that ECEC has a curriculum of hybrid cultures (Western ideas, Soviet Union, Chinese traditions and culture) that impacted in integrated a play based, playful learning and play based curriculum that international research has shown that is the most effective way of caring and educating young children. The concept of “eduplay” that is unique in the Chinese context needs to be explored further and examine how “eduplay” can be integrated as part of play based pedagogy. It is our understanding that “eduplay” has many similarities with the concept of playful learning and this needs to be explored further.
- Types and methods of quality assurance of the whole ECEC. Currently there is research but it is either on small scale or examines western approaches, so more large scales studies are required towards understanding what will make an effective measurement of quality assurance that examines not only children outcomes but the learning environment and classroom interactions.
- How smooth continuation between home and ECEC and ECEC to primary can be achieved and what constitutes effective transitions. It became evident that children do several activities at home with parents (play for learning) so an examination how these activities are extended or continued in the ECEC is required.
- How children’s rights can be communicated effectively and culturally appropriate at all levels but especially to parents, teachers and children themselves.
- What constitutes effective pedagogy and curriculum based on culturally appropriate methodology. How play based pedagogy can be translated in a way that is understood and culturally accepted, what constitutes play in the Chinese context and how this corresponds on international research on play; how adult initiated activities and child initiated activities can be integrated and balanced in the daily activities of the ECEC.
- How can provision for 0 to 3s be improved in terms of pedagogy, curriculum and teacher training? What makes an effective and culturally appropriate care and education for this age group?
- Ways of providing care and education for children with disabilities and special needs.
- Thorough exploration on the childrearing patterns and the lives of Chinese boys and girls, not only in urban, affluent areas but also in the countryside and among families of migrant

and urban lower-class backgrounds. There is also a need for additional studies that would document the life conditions and subject formation processes of ethnic minority children; street children; child laborers, and children with illness and disability in China.

- The voices of children themselves and a recognition of their agency and active role as meaning makers in a way that is not conflicting the Chinese traditions and values. Only by documenting Chinese children's interactions with both adults and peers, and by allowing children of various backgrounds to report about their worlds and experiences in their own words, can we gain a more thorough understanding of the nature of Chinese childhood today.
- How Chinese policy makers should find a way of incorporating private services into the overall development strategies in order to provide high quality ECEC services.

### 9.3 Early literacy development

It became evident that Chinese language is complex, and its teaching is requiring a methodology that is different from the ones used in alphabetic languages. The findings from the studies examined here suggest that instructional strategies are important for the development of early literacy. Home environment is also valuable.

Studies on how children are actively engaged with interesting, meaningful and functional way with literacy learning as well as what constitutes a rich print environment are needed. Also, it is important to explore strategies that balance teachers' instruction and child interests in engaging with Chinese characters and how children's experiences can be used for literacy teaching. Early literacy development is based on the principles of interesting functional and meaningful learning processes and these principles need to be studied into more detailed. As ECEC in mainland China are not allowed to teach literacy and there are no official guidelines or textbooks on developing early literacy, teachers have been left at a loss and some parents teach children to read and write at home whereas others do not, leading to individual differences among children.

### 9.4 Family and parental education

There is a wealth of literature examining family and parental involvement in children's caring and education. Research also emerges examining parents and children's development and wellbeing especially for the migrant and left behind children. It became evident from the researched examined in this review that there is a need to explore:

- Effective ways of integrating migrant families in the urban cities and systems as well as the children in all aspects of their lives (education, social life, health systems).

- The impact of migrant parents living their children in rural areas, and what strategies can be developed to support these families either being reunited with their children or what are the most effective ways that children left behind, and parents stay connected.
- Parents' attitudes and aptitudes towards children's play for fun and their views on children's rights as introduced by UNCRC and what are the most effective ways of parents and society to be aware of children's rights.
- Effective parental interventions of children with special needs and learning difficulties.
- Effective parent education programmes that involve the establishment and maintenance of rapport and understanding of parents' individual needs and interests and explore ways on how to provide parent education to low income and immigrant parents.

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# 11. APPENDIX 1 PUBLICATIONS THAT MET SELECTION CRITERIA IN STAGE 1 OF THE LITERATURE REVIEW

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