

# A Study on the Current Situation of Self-Evaluation of Kindergarten Educational Process Quality from the Perspective of Kindergarten Principals' Evaluation: Taking Chuzhou City as an Example

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## ABSTRACT

Taking Chuzhou City as an example, this study, from the perspective of kindergarten principals' evaluation, developed an evaluation tool based on the Guidelines for the Evaluation of Kindergarten Care and Education Quality (hereinafter referred to as the Guidelines for Evaluation), and used questionnaire survey and interview method to investigate and explore the principals' evaluation of kindergarten educational process quality. By synthesizing questionnaire data and interview materials, this study identified the following problems: 1. The scores of principals' self-evaluation on kindergarten educational process quality are generally high, and the self-evaluation is highly subjective; 2. The principals' self-evaluation on kindergarten educational process quality is greatly affected by external evaluation; 3. The interpretation of evaluation indicators for kindergarten educational process quality is not in-depth, and principals' self-evaluation ability needs to be further improved. In response to the above problems, this study put forward the following suggestions and reflections: 1. Strengthen ideological guidance and concept iteration to stimulate principals' internal motivation for self-evaluation; 2. Intensify thematic training to fully understand the connotation of evaluation indicators and improve principals' professional cognitive ability for self-evaluation; 3. Construct a collaborative research community of principals for self-evaluation empowered by professional evaluators; 4. Establish a regular mechanism for principals' evaluation in the self-evaluation of kindergarten educational process quality.

## KEYWORDS

Kindergarten principals' evaluation; Educational process; Self-evaluation

## 1 Introduction

Since the State Council issued the Several Opinions on the Current Development of Preschool Education ("Ten National Guidelines") in 2010, preschool education in China has entered a stage of rapid development. After more than a decade of leapfrog development, China's preschool education has achieved universal coverage in terms of quantity, and the current goal is to comprehensively improve the quality of preschool education. To achieve this arduous task, establishing a scientific and reasonable evaluation index system for preschool education quality is the prerequisite and foundation. Therefore, the Ministry of Education issued the Guidelines for the Evaluation of Kindergarten Care and Education Quality in February 2022. However, regarding what constitutes high-quality preschool education, there is a basic consensus that process quality is more important than structural quality—only high process quality can lead to high-quality preschool education<sup>[1]</sup>. For a long time, preschool education institutions such as kindergartens in China have passively accepted various inspections and evaluations on structural quality, while paying insufficient attention to the connotative development of kindergarten education quality and the quality of educational processes. The issuance of the Guidelines for Evaluation takes the quality of kindergarten care and education processes as the focus of quality evaluation, and provides clear guidance on "what to evaluate" and "how to evaluate" for process quality evaluation<sup>[2]</sup>. That is, it guides internal stakeholders in kindergarten development to conduct self-evaluation against the evaluation indicators of the Guidelines for Evaluation, continuously reflect and improve in daily care and education practices, and promote the spiral improvement of educational process quality. Kindergarten principals are the managers and decision-makers of kindergarten education work, as well as the leaders of kindergarten development. Principals can conveniently enter classrooms to conduct on-site observation and evaluation of the quality of teachers' teaching processes, and they are advantageous evaluation subjects independent of the implementers of care and education, so their evaluation is relatively objective and fair. Therefore, taking Chuzhou City as an example, this study, from the perspective of kindergarten principals' evaluation, developed an evaluation tool based on the Guidelines for Evaluation to investigate and explore the current situation of self-evaluation of kindergarten educational process quality, aiming to conduct a preliminary exploration into the practice of self-evaluation of kindergarten educational process quality.

## 2 Research Methods

### 2.1 Research Objects

This study mainly adopted questionnaire survey and interview survey. The questionnaire survey targeted kindergarten principals in 2 districts, 4 counties, and 2 county-level cities under the jurisdiction of Chuzhou City, Anhui Province. Questionnaires were distributed online, and 117 valid questionnaires were recovered, with an effective recovery rate of

100%. The sample distribution is detailed in Table 1. Interviews were mainly conducted via telephone, covering 6 principals with typical representativeness.

Table 1 Statistical Table of Basic Information of Respondents

				N = 117			
Item	Category	Number of People	Proportion (%)	Item	Category	Number of People	Proportion (%)
Gender	Male	3	2.6	Age	18-35years old	41	35.0
	Female	114	97.4		36-49years old	46	39.3
Teaching Experience	5years and below	18	15.4		50years old and above	30	25.6
	6-10years	22	18.8	Educational Background	Junior college	47	40.2
	11-19years	17	14.5		Bachelor's degree	69	59.0
	20years and above	60	51.3	Master's degree and above	1	0.9	
Major	Preschool education	74	63.2	Region	Langya District	40	34.2
	Education-related majors	33	28.2		Nanqiao District	6	5.1
	Art-related majors	2	1.7		Counties	20	17.1
	Other majors	8	6.8		County-level cities	51	43.6
Kindergarten Nature	Public (independent)	47	40.2	Kindergarten Level	Provincial First-Class Level 1	8	6.8
	Public (affiliated)	39	33.3		Municipal First-Class Level 1	60	51.3
Private inclusive	26	22.2	Unrated		49	41.9	
	Private (non-inclusive)	5	4.3				

## 2.2 Research Tools

The research tools of this study mainly included an interview outline and a questionnaire. The interview outline was developed around aspects such as self-evaluation awareness, influencing factors of self-evaluation, and puzzles in self-evaluation. Referring to the 3 key indicators (activity organization, teacher-child interaction, home-kindergarten co-education) and their 17 inspection points under the "educational process" (a key content in the evaluation indicators of the Guidelines for Evaluation), the questionnaire further refined and decomposed these 17 inspection points. It adopted the 5-point Likert scale scoring method (1 = "Strongly Disagree", 5 = "Strongly Agree") and combined with the characteristics of preschool education development in Chuzhou City to develop the Questionnaire on Self-Evaluation of Kindergarten Educational Process Quality (Principal Version). The questionnaire contained a total of 32 questions and was divided into two parts: the first part covered basic information such as demographic variables, and the second part was the Self-Evaluation Form of Kindergarten Educational Process Quality (for Principals), which included 22 questions in three dimensions: activity organization, teacher-child interaction, and home-kindergarten co-education. This study used Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient method, KMO and Bartlett's test, and content validity test to test the reliability and validity of the questionnaire (as shown in Table 2 and Table 3). The Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was 0.935, the KMO value was 0.919, and the significance value (sig.) was 0.000, reaching a significant level. The correlation coefficients between the dimensions of the questionnaire ranged from 0.876 to 0.964. The test results showed that the questionnaire had good reliability and validity and could be used as a tool for principals to conduct self-evaluation of their kindergarten's educational process quality.

Table 2 Reliability Analysis of the Questionnaire

Scale Used	Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items	KMO	sign
Questionnaire on Self-Evaluation of Kindergarten Educational Process Quality (Principal Version)	0.935	32	0.919	0.000

Table 3 Content Validity Analysis of the Questionnaire

	Activity Organization	Teacher-Child Interaction	Home-Kindergarten Co-education	Overall Educational Process
Activity Organization	1			
Teacher-Child Interaction	.903**	1		
Home-Kindergarten Co-education	.876**	.908**	1	
Overall Educational Process	.959**	.971**	.964**	1

\*\* indicates  $P < 0.01$

## 2.3 Data Processing

This study used SPSS 27.0 to process and analyze the data from the Questionnaire on Self-Evaluation of Kindergarten Educational Process Quality (Principal Version). First, to ensure the validity of the questionnaire, reliability and validity tests were conducted. Second, descriptive statistics and analysis were performed on the questionnaire data. Finally, to explore the influence of demographic variables, one-way ANOVA was conducted on the demographic variables. For the

processing of interview data, the telephone recording materials were organized into text materials according to the dimensions of the interview outline to conduct in-depth exploration of relevant research content.

### 3 Results and Analysis

#### 3.1 Descriptive Analysis of Self-Evaluation of Kindergarten Educational Process Quality in Chuzhou City

##### 3.1.1 Overall Situation of Self-Evaluation of Kindergarten Educational Process Quality in Chuzhou City

From the perspective of kindergarten principals, this study evaluated the activity organization, teacher-child interaction, home-kindergarten co-education, and the overall educational process quality of kindergartens in Chuzhou City, and analyzed the overall situation of self-evaluation of kindergarten educational process quality. The results are detailed in Table 4.

Table 4 Overall Situation of Self-Evaluation of Kindergarten Educational Process Quality

N = 117		
Dimension	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)
Activity Organization	4.34	0.683
Teacher-Child Interaction	4.38	0.698
Home-Kindergarten Co-education	4.30	0.751
Overall Educational Process	4.34	0.686

As shown in Table 4, the total mean score of self-evaluation of kindergarten educational process quality in Chuzhou City was 4.34, indicating that the overall quality of kindergarten educational processes was good from the perspective of principals' evaluation. Among the dimensions, the quality of teacher-child interaction ( $M = 4.38$ ,  $SD = 0.698$ ) was slightly higher than that of activity organization ( $M = 4.34$ ,  $SD = 0.683$ ) and home-kindergarten co-education ( $M = 4.30$ ,  $SD = 0.751$ ). This shows that principals have a higher recognition of the quality of teacher-child interaction in kindergartens, while their recognition of the quality of home-kindergarten co-education is slightly lower, indicating that the quality of home-kindergarten co-education work in kindergartens needs further improvement.

##### 3.1.2 Self-Evaluation of Kindergarten Educational Process Quality in Different Regions of Chuzhou City

The respondents of this study included kindergarten principals from 2 districts, 4 counties, and 2 county-level cities in Chuzhou City. As shown in Table 5, the mean scores of principals in Nanqiao District on the quality of activity organization ( $M = 3.86$ ,  $SD = 1.26$ ), teacher-child interaction ( $M = 3.97$ ,  $SD = 1.43$ ), home-kindergarten co-education ( $M = 4.00$ ,  $SD = 1.46$ ), and overall educational process quality ( $M = 3.94$ ,  $SD = 1.36$ ) of their kindergartens were significantly lower than those in other districts, counties, and county-level cities. This indicates that principals in Nanqiao District have a lower recognition of the educational process quality of their kindergartens compared with those in other districts, counties, and county-level cities of Chuzhou City.

Table 5 Self-Evaluation of Kindergarten Educational Process Quality in Different Regions

N = 117				
Region	Activity Organization(M±SD)	Teacher-Child Interaction (M±SD)	Home-Kindergarten Co-education(M±SD)	Overall Educational Process (M±SD)
Langya District	4.35±0.61	4.38±0.64	4.38±0.63	4.37±0.61
Nanqiao District	3.86±1.26	3.97±1.43	4.00±1.46	3.94±1.36
Counties	4.22±0.85	4.25±0.77	4.19±0.76	4.22±0.77
County-level cities	4.43±0.56	4.47±0.58	4.31±0.74	4.40±0.60

##### 3.1.3 Self-Evaluation of Kindergarten Educational Process Quality by Kindergarten Nature in Chuzhou City

In terms of kindergarten nature, the respondents of this study were principals from four types of kindergartens: public (independent) kindergartens, public (affiliated) kindergartens, private inclusive kindergartens, and private (non-inclusive) kindergartens. As shown in Table 6, the mean scores of principals in private inclusive kindergartens on the quality of activity organization ( $M = 4.08$ ,  $SD = 0.78$ ), teacher-child interaction ( $M = 4.09$ ,  $SD = 0.86$ ), home-kindergarten co-education ( $M = 4.04$ ,  $SD = 0.87$ ), and overall educational process quality ( $M = 4.07$ ,  $SD = 0.83$ ) of their kindergartens were significantly lower than those in other types of kindergartens. This indicates that principals in private inclusive kindergartens have a lower recognition of the educational process quality of their kindergartens compared with those in other types of kindergartens. In addition, principals in private (non-inclusive) kindergartens gave significantly higher scores on the educational process quality (including activity organization, teacher-child interaction, and home-kindergarten co-education) of their kindergartens than those in the two types of public kindergartens.

Table 6 Self-Evaluation of Kindergarten Educational Process Quality by Kindergarten Nature

Kindergarten Nature	N = 117			
	Activity Organization (M±SD)	Teacher-Child Interaction (M±SD)	Home-Kindergarten Co-education(M±SD)	Overall Educational Process (M±SD)
Public (independent)	4.39±0.73	4.43±0.71	4.40±0.72	4.41±0.70
Public (affiliated)	4.38±0.52	4.45±0.54	4.27±0.70	4.37±0.54
Private inclusive	4.08±0.78	4.09±0.86	4.04±0.87	4.07±0.83
Private (non-inclusive)	4.80±0.45	4.84±0.36	4.77±0.52	4.80±0.44

### 3.1.4 Self-Evaluation of Kindergarten Educational Process Quality by Kindergarten Level in Chuzhou City

In terms of kindergarten level, the respondents of this study included principals from three levels of kindergartens: Provincial First-Class Level 1, Municipal First-Class Level 1, and unrated. As shown in Table 7, principals of Provincial First-Class Level 1 kindergartens gave the highest scores on the educational process quality (including activity organization, teacher-child interaction, and home-kindergarten co-education) of their kindergartens, followed by those of Municipal First-Class Level 1 kindergartens, and the lowest scores were given by principals of unrated kindergartens.

Table 7 Self-Evaluation of Kindergarten Educational Process Quality by Kindergarten Level

Kindergarten Level	N = 117			
	Activity Organization (M±SD)	Teacher-Child Interaction (M±SD)	Home-Kindergarten Co-education (M±SD)	Overall Educational Process (M±SD)
Provincial First-Class Level 1	4.96±0.08	4.99±0.04	5.00±0.00	4.98±0.03
Municipal First-Class Level 1	4.36±0.62	4.38±0.63	4.35±0.67	4.37±0.61
Unrated	4.20±0.76	4.27±0.78	4.12±0.83	4.20±0.76

### 3.2 Difference Analysis of Self-Evaluation of Kindergarten Educational Process Quality in Chuzhou City

To explore the influence of factors such as principals' age, educational background, major, kindergarten region, kindergarten nature, and kindergarten level on the evaluation of kindergarten educational process quality, this study took these factors as independent variables and conducted a difference test on the evaluation of kindergarten educational process quality (including activity organization, teacher-child interaction, and home-kindergarten co-education). The test results showed that there were no significant differences in the evaluation of kindergarten educational process quality (activity organization, teacher-child interaction, home-kindergarten co-education) in terms of principals' age, educational background, major, kindergarten region, and kindergarten nature (all P values > 0.05). However, as shown in Table 8, there were significant differences in the evaluation of kindergarten educational process quality (activity organization, teacher-child interaction, home-kindergarten co-education) among different kindergarten levels. Post-hoc multiple comparison (LSD) showed that the scores of Provincial First-Class Level 1 kindergartens > Municipal First-Class Level 1 kindergartens > unrated kindergartens. This indicates that principals of Provincial First-Class Level 1 kindergartens have a higher recognition of the educational process quality of their kindergartens (including activity organization, teacher-child interaction, and home-kindergarten co-education) than those of Municipal First-Class Level 1 kindergartens, and principals of Municipal First-Class Level 1 kindergartens have a higher recognition than those of unrated kindergartens. The self-evaluation of educational process quality by principals of the three levels of kindergartens shows an obvious hierarchical pattern.

Table 8 Differences in Self-Evaluation of Kindergarten Educational Process Quality by Kindergarten Level

Dimension	Provincial First-Class	Municipal First-Class	Unratedl M(SD)	F	P(sig)
	Level 1 j M(SD)	Level 1 k M(SD)			
Activity Organization	4.96(0.08)	4.36(0.62)	4.20(0.76)	4.544	0.013
Teacher-Child Interaction	4.99(0.04)	4.38(0.63)	4.27(0.78)	3.821	0.025
Home-Kindergarten Co-education	5.00(0.00)	4.35(0.67)	4.12(0.83)	5.473	0.005
Overall Educational Process	4.98(0.03)	4.37(0.61)	4.20(0.76)	4.936	0.009

\* indicates P < 0.05, \*\* indicates P < 0.01

## 4 Problem Analysis of Self-Evaluation of Kindergarten Educational Process Quality from the Perspective of Principals' Evaluation

The Scores of Self-Evaluation on Kindergarten Educational Process Quality Are Generally High, and the Self-Evaluation Is Highly Subjective

The analysis of the questionnaire survey shows that kindergarten principals generally give high scores on the

evaluation of educational process quality (including teachers' activity organization, teacher-child interaction, and home-kindergarten co-education) of their kindergartens. Overall, the mean scores of activity organization, teacher-child interaction, home-kindergarten co-education, and the overall educational process are all above 4 points, and there are no significant differences in terms of principals' age, educational background, major, kindergarten region, and kindergarten nature. This indicates that from the perspective of principals' evaluation, the overall quality of kindergarten educational processes is good and has received high recognition from principals, resulting in a "ceiling effect" in principals' evaluation of kindergarten educational process quality. To a certain extent, this effect indicates that principals have a certain subjective bias in the self-evaluation of the educational process quality of teachers in their kindergartens, showing a subjective confidence of being "lost in the midst of one's own affairs".

#### **4.1 The Self-Evaluation of Kindergarten Educational Process Quality Is Greatly Affected by External Evaluation**

The analysis of questionnaire data shows that there are significant differences in the mean scores of principals' evaluation on teachers' activity organization, teacher-child interaction, home-kindergarten co-education, and the overall educational process among different kindergarten levels. The higher the kindergarten level, the higher the score of principals' self-evaluation on kindergarten educational process quality. The self-evaluation of educational process quality by principals of the three levels of kindergartens shows an obvious hierarchical pattern. The classification of kindergarten levels is a typical result of external evaluation, and principals are obviously affected by external evaluation to a certain extent in the self-evaluation of educational process quality, conducting internal self-evaluation with the "halo effect" of external evaluation.

#### **4.2 The Interpretation of Evaluation Indicators for Kindergarten Educational Process Quality Is Not In-Depth, and Principals' Self-Evaluation Ability Needs to Be Further Improved**

Through interviews, this study found that under the promotion and guidance of local educational administrative departments, kindergarten principals have initially learned and interpreted the various evaluation indicators and their connotations of the educational process in the Guidelines for Evaluation through a top-down approach, and have a certain awareness of self-evaluation. However, the interpretation and research of evaluation indicators is a process of going from the surface to the core and in-depth layer by layer. Interviews revealed that currently, kindergarten principals do not have an in-depth interpretation of the 3 key indicators and their 17 inspection points of the educational process in the evaluation indicators. It is difficult for them to diagnose the current level of educational process quality of their kindergartens, and it is also difficult to identify the real gaps against the inspection points of the indicators. They face the dilemmas of "what to evaluate" and "how to evaluate". This leads to the "ceiling effect" in principals' evaluation of kindergarten educational process quality in the questionnaire survey, and even the phenomenon that principals of private kindergartens give significantly higher scores on the educational process quality of their kindergartens than those of the two types of public kindergartens.

### **5 Suggestions and Reflections**

Strengthen Ideological Guidance and Concept Iteration to Stimulate Principals' Internal Motivation for Self-Evaluation of Educational Process Quality. Kindergarten principals have three professional roles: "educator", "leader", and "manager"<sup>[3]</sup>. For the self-evaluation and quality improvement of kindergarten educational process quality, principals play a core "leader" role. Their ideological awareness of self-evaluation and values of continuous improvement determine whether their kindergartens can truly implement the guidance of the Guidelines for Evaluation, learn to "look in the mirror", fully understand the connotation based on the actual situation against the key indicators and inspection points of the educational process, conduct self-diagnosis, self-reflection, and continuous improvement. In terms of educational management responsibilities, districts and counties are the main responsible entities for managing preschool education<sup>[4]</sup>. Therefore, district and county bureaus of education and sports and their preschool education research institutions should actively promote the ideological and conceptual education and practical guidance on the self-evaluation and quality improvement of educational process quality for principals of various kindergartens in their jurisdictions. They should guide principals to shift from focusing on external evaluation to strengthening internal self-evaluation of kindergartens, get rid of the halo effect of external evaluation results, promote the update and iteration of principals' evaluation concepts, deeply explore the motivation mechanism of internal evaluation, and stimulate principals' internal motivation for self-evaluation of kindergarten educational process quality, so as to solve the problem of "why to evaluate".

Intensify Thematic Training to Fully Understand the Connotation of Evaluation Indicators and Improve Principals' Professional Cognitive Ability for Self-Evaluation of Educational Process Quality. The 3 key indicators and their 17 inspection points of the educational process in the evaluation indicators of the Guidelines for Evaluation describe the basic scenarios and states of high-quality kindergarten educational processes, providing a reference template for principals to conduct self-evaluation. However, the actual situation of the educational process of each kindergarten has certain uniqueness and differences. To effectively diagnose the current level of educational process quality of a

kindergarten and identify the real gaps, principals need to deeply explore and fully understand the connotation of the 3 key indicators and their 17 inspection points of the educational process in combination with the actual situation of their kindergartens.

Therefore, district and county bureaus of education and sports and their preschool education research institutions should organize various forms of thematic training on the Guidelines for Evaluation for principals of various kindergartens in their jurisdictions. This training should help principals clarify the value orientation, internal logical relationship, and quality requirements of the key indicators and their inspection points of the kindergarten educational process, promote their in-depth interpretation of the connotation and extension of the evaluation indicators, improve principals' professional ability for self-evaluation at the cognitive level, help principals overcome their subjective bias and subjective confidence in the self-evaluation process, and solve the problem of "what to evaluate".

Construct a Collaborative Research Community of Principals for Self-Evaluation Empowered by Professional Evaluators Although the purpose of self-evaluation is not to obtain an accurate and comparable result <sup>[5]</sup>, self-evaluation should ensure professionalism and follow the "evidence-based principle" rather than being "random". Therefore, constructing a collaborative research community of principals for self-evaluation empowered by professional evaluators will be an effective strategy to solve the problem of "how to evaluate" from the perspective of principals' evaluation. First, professional evaluators guide and assist principals in collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data related to the kindergarten educational process, empowering principals to conduct self-evaluation of educational process quality and ensuring the professionalism of self-evaluation. Second, the construction of a collaborative research community of principals for self-evaluation helps principals share resources with each other around specific themes and generate new professional resources in the process of mutual inspiration <sup>[6]</sup>. By giving full play to the team role of the community, under the empowerment and guidance of professional evaluators, the team conducts discussions and collective reflections, forms a consensus on self-evaluation, collectively develops self-evaluation tools, designs self-evaluation procedures, improves self-evaluation plans, drives the joint development of community members, and continuously improves the professional practical ability of principals' groups in self-evaluation.

Establish a Regular Mechanism for Principals' Evaluation in the Self-Evaluation of Kindergarten Educational Process Quality The Guidelines for Evaluation clearly states that "kindergartens should conduct self-evaluation once a semester", which clearly requires kindergartens to establish a regular self-evaluation mechanism. Principals are the "leaders" who guide kindergartens to conduct self-evaluation. Focusing on the self-evaluation of kindergarten educational process quality concerned in this study, the first priority is to establish a regular mechanism for principals' evaluation in the self-evaluation of kindergarten educational process quality. This mechanism should organically integrate principals' evaluation of educational process quality with principals' daily work in educational and teaching management, teaching research organization, home-kindergarten co-education, and teacher team construction. On this basis, a problem list of the kindergarten's educational process quality is periodically refined and collectively fed back to the kindergarten's teachers. Specific improvement measures are proposed through collective comparison, collective diagnosis, and collective reflection, so as to drive the kindergarten's teachers to conduct self-evaluation and self-diagnosis of their own educational practices in daily care and education practices and continuously improve the quality of kindergarten educational processes.

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