

Research on the Profession Development of Early Education Teachers for Children Aged 0 to 3 Years Old

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Abstract: The early childhood development plays a foundational role in the sustained progress of a nation, while also serving as a vital safeguard for promoting comprehensive individual growth. Following the release of the "Guiding Opinions on Promoting the Development of Care Services for Infants and Toddlers Under the Age of 3" by the State Council Office in May 2019, China has embarked on the construction of a professional teaching staff for early childhood education tailored to the 0-3 age group. Building upon an examination of the professional development of educators in the field of early childhood education for ages 0-3, this article categorizes existing literature into several dimensions: exploration of role positioning and competencies, requisite professional knowledge and skills, establishment of developmental support systems, autonomous learning and reflective practice, as well as international comparative research. The paper provides a brief overview of these aspects based on the literature.

Keywords: professional development, role positioning, competencies, professional knowledge, literature overview

1. Introduction

The period of early education spanning from birth to three years of age is widely recognized as a pivotal phase in children's holistic development, exerting a substantial influence on their cognitive, emotional, social, and physical growth. Early education teachers play a central role in delivering educational services during this critical period. Enhancing their professional development assumes paramount significance in elevating educational quality and fostering the well-rounded advancement of children. With the unveiling of the "Guiding Opinions of the General Office of the State Council on Advancing Services for Infants and Young Children under the Age of 3" in May 2019, China has articulated a commitment to expedite the training of early education teachers and related experts in the field of infant and young child care[1].

In recent times, researchers have embarked on extensive investigations into the professional evolution of early education teachers aged 0-3, yielding notable strides in research endeavors. This comprehensive review aims to assess the advancements and trajectories observed in the professional development of early education teachers aged 0-3 within contemporary contexts. Furthermore, this exploration endeavors to anticipate potential avenues for future growth and development."

2. Exploring Role Definition and Competence of Early Education Practitioners for Children Aged 0-3

The occupational roles of early education practitioners working with children aged 0-3 encompass positions within childcare centers, including kindergarten classes, and specialized early education institutions. Notably distinct from caregivers, newborn caregivers, and nannies, early education practitioners undertake responsibilities characterized by their educational nature. While nurses primarily attend to childcare tasks within kindergartens, aiding kindergarten teachers, their educational qualifications typically encompass a high school diploma or higher. Conversely, newborn caregivers and nannies engage in domestic services tailored to the care of mothers and infants, without explicit educational prerequisites.

Differentiation is also apparent between early education practitioners and kindergarten teachers. The latter generally possess expertise in education methods for children aged 3-6, whereas those aged 0-3 occupy a distinct developmental phase. Given the distinctive physical and cognitive attributes of infants and toddlers, even educators with kindergarten teaching credentials must undergo specialized training and assessment specific to early education for children aged 0-3 when transitioning into this field. Successful completion of these requirements certifies them as qualified early education practitioners.

The role of early education practitioners extends beyond caregiving to assume a guiding position for infants and young children. Adeptness in childcare, encompassing areas such as daily care, health preservation, dietary nutrition, and developmental milestones, is essential. However, proficiency in education is equally vital. Skillfulness in harnessing innate potential, recognizing pivotal developmental stages, possessing a well-rounded personality, gentle demeanor, optimistic outlook, receptiveness to novel knowledge and ideas, an inclination toward discovery, research aptitude, and an ongoing self-improvement orientation are imperative.

Moreover, early education practitioners are tasked with evaluating and steering psychological and behavioral development, delivering holistic early childhood development guidance to families and communities alike.

Demanding high standards of literacy and character, early education institutions prioritize certain attributes among practitioners. Foremost among these is a profound love for children, coupled with care, patience, and a strong sense of responsibility. Subsequently, professional ethics and personal character follow suit. This construct comprises elements like child affection, respect for children's rights, responsiveness to their needs, work commitment, professional responsibility, and proactive exploration.

Fueled by genuine affection, practitioners forge close, warm connections with children, establishing bonds of trust and affinity. Valuing children's rights underscores respect for their individuality and autonomy, fostering independent thinking and actions. Addressing infants' and toddlers' needs helps instill a sense of security and trust. Passionate commitment to work drives meticulous preparation for teaching activities, constant educational advancement, and positive collaboration with parents and colleagues. Anchored in unwavering ethical principles, practitioners unfailingly prioritize the welfare of children, safeguarding their rights and diligently addressing safeguarding concerns.

By embodying these attributes, early education practitioners cultivate a favorable learning atmosphere, propelling the comprehensive development of infants and young children. They emerge as integral mentors and guides throughout children's formative years, fostering positive self-perceptions, nurturing interests, aptitudes, and emotions, and laying a robust foundation for subsequent learning and growth.

3. Requisite Professional Expertise and Skills for Early Education Teachers of Ages 0-3

A profound foundation of specialized professional knowledge and skills is imperative for early education teachers. Comprehensive research has ventured into avenues for fostering teachers' expertise and effective training methodologies. A collective body of studies underscores the significance of melding theoretical understanding with hands-on practice, urging educators to actively partake in real-world classroom experiences while refining their competencies through introspection and collaborative discourse. Additionally, interdisciplinary collaboration emerges as a pivotal modality for nurturing teachers' professional advancement[2]. This entails partnering with experts from diverse domains including psychology, medicine, and parental guidance to collectively delve into the nuanced demands of early education teachers.

The majority of studies delve into the realm of early education professionals' knowledge and skills by conducting extensive literature reviews and employing Delphi expert consultations, guided by criteria set across the five or six developmental stages of early childhood. Scholars like Chen Feng, Cui Jie, Cui Shiqi, and Ye Li propose a five-fold framework encompassing aptitudes in infant care, pedagogical efficacy, adeptness in fostering interactions with young learners, collaborative prowess, and self-development acumen. On a similar note, Cheng Siyue outlines six dimensions encompassing the creation of conducive learning environments, the scientific nurturing and guidance of infants and toddlers, support for autonomous exploration and play, meticulous observation, record-keeping, and developmental assessment, effective communication and collaboration with families, peers, and communities, as well as an unwavering commitment to continuous professional growth.

In the present landscape, three discernible trends shape curriculum design: integration of medical

education, accentuation of vocational competencies, and emphasis on comprehensive practitioner readiness. The "integrated medical education" approach encompasses subjects like common infant illnesses, infant care techniques, basic first aid for infant accidents, infant nutrition and dietary considerations, and infant health evaluation and management. Conversely, the "vocational competency" focused curriculum delves into specialized knowledge pertinent to infants and toddlers aged 0-3, spanning areas such as infant psychology, fundamentals of early education, assessment and evaluation of infant behavior, guidance for early infant education and activities, infant health and well-being, theoretical frameworks for infant play and guidance, as well as nurturing infant-family dynamics. Moreover, the curriculum tailored for "applied general subject teachers" incorporates diverse courses encompassing subjects such as music, dance, calligraphy, and more.

4. Establishing a Support System for Teacher Development

A strong support system is essential for fostering the professional growth of early childhood education teachers. Research has concentrated on crafting pathways for teachers' career advancement and creating mechanisms for promotion. This includes offering a range of support measures like professional training, mentorship, and collaborative opportunities with peers to facilitate an ongoing process of teacher development. Introducing consistent professional development plans that align with teachers' day-to-day responsibilities plays a crucial role in igniting their motivation and passion for learning, ultimately elevating their expertise.

Certain educators have put forth the idea of instituting comprehensive professional standards. These standards would clearly outline the knowledge, skills, and qualities that early childhood education teachers should possess. Specific criteria would be established for educational background, qualifications, proficiencies, instructional aptitudes, child assessment and observation abilities, collaborative engagement with families and communities, as well as continuous professional growth. In terms of mechanisms to advance early childhood education, the QRIS model has been introduced in the United States. Lee Eunyoung and Subramaniam (2022) suggest that this QRIS system involves educational institutions organizing early childhood education training, regulatory bodies providing consistent technical support, and financial incentives fostering teachers' professional development. Similarly, the European Commission (2018) recommends evaluating applicants' qualifications and personal attributes during training, providing explicit training content and duration, and jointly conducting assessments with educational institutions and businesses[3]. The emphasis is on evaluating teaching performance and professional skills, while placing importance on observation and practical teaching abilities.

With regards to teacher qualification training in the early childhood education field, existing research indicates that it is primarily organized by national education and labor departments, educational institution headquarters, and internal bodies. However, training objectives often lack specificity, leading to superficial outcomes, compounded by inadequate assessment and evaluation practices. Typically, participating teachers are only required to submit training summaries or share their experiences within their institutions, and assessments are either insufficient or entirely absent, resulting in suboptimal evaluation outcomes[4]. The practicality of training content is also frequently overlooked, and the absence of long-term mechanisms makes it challenging to ensure that teachers effectively implement their newly acquired knowledge in their teaching practices. Nonetheless, numerous sources present their perspectives on training curricula, suggesting that these standards should encompass various facets, including child development, teaching methodologies, curriculum design, assessment strategies, and effective communication with parents.

Zhang Haiyan (2020) carefully curated courses suitable for the field of early childhood education, focusing on professional attitudes, knowledge, and skills. The curriculum was divided into distinct categories, encompassing general knowledge, specialized expertise, professional competencies, and hands-on practical know-how. Employing the Yaahp software analytic hierarchy process, Ye Pingzhi (2022) proposed a curriculum design approach that takes into account vocational, infant and toddler, childcare activity, family and community perspectives, along with individual traits and professional growth considerations. Li Hongbin (2019) underscored the importance of augmenting practical abilities within the coursework of vocational colleges. Emphasis was placed on pedagogical prowess, holistic understanding, real-world applicability, and relevance to contemporary trends. Furthermore, the seamless integration of practical courses across the curriculum emerged as a critical necessity. Within the structure of early childhood education programs in higher vocational institutions, practical components like early childhood education surveys, curriculum internships, parent-child curriculum training activities, and professional internships should constitute more than 30% of the curriculum. These practical modules

were intended to be intertwined with theoretical content throughout the academic year.

Evidently, the curriculum formulation for nurturing early childhood educators in China predominantly centers around the distinctive developmental phase of infants and toddlers aged 0 to 3 years. This deliberation entails striking a balance between the aspects of "education" and "care". Notably, courses encompassing both educational and caregiving elements are consistently incorporated[5]. The creation of curriculum models draws inspiration from several theoretical frameworks, including the iceberg model, onion model of competence, and core literacy structure model. Notably, these models are informed by data analysis, scrutinizing parental preferences and frequently used keywords from early childhood education establishments. This integration of theoretical frameworks with data analysis enriches the establishment of a comprehensive indicator system through the application of data analysis methodologies.

5. Fostering Independent Learning and Reflective Practice Among Educators

Encouraging independent learning and reflective practice among educators holds paramount significance in advancing the professional growth of early childhood teachers. Research underscores that proactive involvement in self-directed learning and reflective practice enables educators to consistently refine their instructional abilities and professional aptitude[6]. Notably, the practice of teaching observations is extensively integrated into educators' autonomous learning journeys. Through the observation of peers' teaching methodologies, educators can glean valuable insights from effective strategies and subsequently evaluate and enhance their own teaching approaches. Furthermore, the establishment of research clusters and the cultivation of peer interaction emerge as potent avenues for educators to actively participate in independent learning and reflective practice[7].

6. Cross-Cultural and International Comparative Studies

The significance of cross-cultural and international comparative studies in advancing the early childhood education sector cannot be overstated. Such studies facilitate the exchange of experiences among countries and regions, thereby nurturing the professional growth of local early childhood educators. Presented below are several strategies and benchmarks pertaining to the professionalization of early childhood educators across diverse nations:

In the United States, the drive towards professionalization within early childhood education is predominantly evident in two key facets. Firstly, the Early Childhood Development Associate Credential system provides avenues for early childhood practitioners to obtain professional certifications and embark on career progression. Secondly, bodies like the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) have established a framework of professional standards for early childhood educators. This framework encompasses requisites such as the creation of secure and suitable learning environments, the facilitation of physical and cognitive development, support for early social development in young learners, cultivation of positive familial relationships, orchestration of targeted activities with specific objectives, and the continuous cultivation of personal professional advancement.

In the United Kingdom, the "Early Years Teacher Standards" have been introduced to ensure that early childhood educators possess not only theoretical expertise but also practical proficiency. These standards necessitate educators to set appropriate objectives for early education, facilitate holistic child development, possess specialized knowledge and pedagogical skills, contribute to child development, grasp and employ assessment tools for early development, ensure the physical and emotional well-being of children, and fulfill a wide spectrum of professional responsibilities.

Australia, on its part, has established the "Australian Professional Standards for Teachers," which delineates the prerequisites for educators in terms of professional knowledge, practical exposure, and developmental capabilities. These standards span seven domains, encompassing a clear grasp of learning processes, mastery of instructional techniques, crafting and execution of educational plans, establishment and maintenance of secure and supportive learning spaces, the ability to assess student learning and provide constructive feedback, dedication to personal professional growth, and effective engagement with peers and parents in a professional capacity.

In Japan, educators specializing in early childhood education are known as "hoyu-shi", and their certification examination encompasses a written test covering a wide array of topics. These include child care principles, educational principles, child and family welfare systems, social welfare systems, social

care, child psychology in caregiving, child health, child nutrition, as well as theoretical and practical facets of child care practices.

By engaging in cross-cultural and international comparative research, different nations can gain valuable insights into the professional development models and standards embraced by other countries for early childhood education educators. This knowledge can serve as a point of reference and a source of inspiration for the enhancement of their own nation's early childhood education domain. This collaborative process contributes to elevating the professional aptitude of early childhood education educators, ultimately resulting in the provision of elevated-quality education and nurturing experiences for young children.

7. Conclusion

Upon conducting an inclusive examination of recent research accomplishments, it becomes apparent that noteworthy strides have been achieved in the professional advancement of early childhood educators catering to the 0-3 age bracket. Across dimensions encompassing the cultivation of professional knowledge and skills, exploration of teacher roles and competencies, establishment of teacher development support frameworks, encouragement of autonomous learning and introspective practice among educators, and participation in cross-cultural and international comparative investigations, manifold facets have proffered indispensable benchmarks and counsel for nurturing educators' professional maturation[8].

Nevertheless, a constellation of challenges and predicaments beckons further solutions. Issues such as optimizing the alignment of research findings with tangible pedagogical implementation, fortifying the establishment of more all-encompassing and efficacious support systems, and fostering the culture of autonomous learning and reflective practice among teachers linger as open inquiries. Forthcoming inquiries can probe deeper into these spheres, furnishing more scientifically grounded and efficacious direction to propel the professional growth of early childhood educators, thereby galvanizing the robust progression of the early childhood education domain[9].

Acknowledgements

Project: Project of the 14th Five Year Plan for Education Science in Hunan Province: Research on the Training Model of Early Education Teachers in Hunan Province under the Background of Early Childhood Education. Project number: ND229202, project approval number: XJK22CJ004.

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