

# Development of Integrated Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) in Kindergartens amid Low Fertility: Challenges and Optimization Strategies

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**Abstract:** *Against the backdrop of declining fertility rates in China, the integration of early childhood education and care (ECEC) has become an imperative for kindergarten transformation and sustainable development. Employing a mixed-methods approach that combines systematic literature review with data analysis. It systematically examines the practical challenges confronting integrated ECEC services in kindergartens across four dimensions: the teaching workforce, curriculum and pedagogy, environmental design, and evaluation systems. Grounded in the philosophy of integrated care and education, the study proposes corresponding optimization strategies: cultivating a high-quality teaching workforce, refining curriculum and activities, creating safe and developmentally appropriate environments, and enhancing the evaluation framework. These measures aim to foster the holistic development of children aged 0–6 in kindergarten settings.*

**Keywords:** *Low fertility rate; Integration of early childhood education and care; Kindergarten transformation*

## 1. Introduction

Amid China's socio-economic development and demographic transitions, the national fertility rate has continued its downward trajectory, rendering care for children aged 0–3 a critical social welfare concern and resulting in underutilization of kindergarten capacity. In response, the three-child policy and its supporting measures, along with the rise of dual-income families, have generated urgent demand for universal, affordable childcare services. Population issues are overarching, long-term, and strategic matters affecting national development. According to data released by the National Bureau of Statistics on January 17, 2025, births in 2024 totaled 9.54 million, with a natural population growth rate of -0.99%, marking the third consecutive year of negative population growth nationwide[1]. Regarding TFR, data from the China Statistical Yearbook 2024 indicate that China's TFR in 2023 was approximately 1.0, ranking among the lowest globally[2]. Early childhood education, as the first stage of the national education system, has been directly impacted by these demographic changes. The 2023 Overview of National Education Development shows that the number of kindergartens nationwide in 2023 stood at 274,400, a decrease of 14,800 (5.1%) from the previous year, influenced by both declining birth rates and urbanization[3]. Consequently, kindergartens are compelled to transform by extending services downward to provide integrated childcare and early childhood education—a natural response to utilize surplus resources and cope with survival pressures.

The state has increasingly emphasized early childhood education and childcare service development, issuing relevant policy documents. The *Guiding Opinions on Promoting the Development of Infant and Toddler Care Services for Children Under 3* (hereinafter referred to as the *Guiding Opinions*), issued by the General Office of the State Council, proposed for the first time that “kindergartens with the necessary conditions should be encouraged and supported to establish childcare classes to enroll children aged 2 to 3”[4]. In 2024, the state gradually increased its support for childcare services; in March 2024, the State Council’s *2024 Government Work Report* explicitly stated, “Increase the supply of childcare services through multiple channels”[5]. The *Law of the People’s Republic of China on Preschool Education*, which took effect in 2025, also states that “kindergartens with the necessary conditions are encouraged to establish infant care classes and provide childcare services”[6]. Collectively, these policy documents have charted a clear course for preschool education development, elevating integrated early childhood education and care to the status of a nationally mandated institutional priority.

With rapid socio-economic development and more dual-income families, parents increasingly seek professional early childhood education beyond intergenerational care. Kindergartens, with their facilities, workforce, and curriculum advantages, are key providers of high-quality integrated ECEC services. First, they promote continuous physical and mental development for children aged 0–6, ensuring a seamless transition between childcare (0–3) and preschool (3–6). The continuity of philosophies, staff, and environments supports children's sense of security and adheres to developmental principles. Second, they alleviate family childcare pressure. Data from the National Health Commission show that in 2024, 7.6% of infants under 3 were enrolled in childcare, up 1.8 percentage points compared with 2021, and by December 2025, over 40% of kindergartens had childcare classes, providing about 3.5 million slots[7]. Kindergarten-based childcare improves quality, reduces parental anxiety and costs, and promotes work-life balance. Third, they make full use of educational resources. With declining enrollment, some kindergartens face closure; in November 2025, the Ministry of Education urged local authorities to “step up efforts to promote the integration of childcare and early childhood education, and make full use of surplus places to provide childcare services”[8]. By offering ECEC services, kindergartens can utilize surplus resources, optimize allocation, and achieve integrated care for 0-6.

Overall, against a low birth rate backdrop, developing high-quality integrated ECEC services in kindergartens is not only an inevitable choice for survival but also an objective requirement to promote children's development, alleviate societal pressures, and optimize resource allocation. This development represents a significant trend in China's preschool education.

## **2. Research Design**

### ***2.1 Research Objectives and Significance***

#### ***2.1.1 Research Objectives***

Against the backdrop of ongoing demographic shifts and declining fertility rates, the issue of integrated ECEC services in kindergartens has become increasingly salient. This study aims to (1) clarify the current state of integrated ECEC services in China through a systematic analysis of existing policy literature; (2) reveal, at multiple levels, the challenges kindergartens face in implementing these services; and (3) explore pathways for optimizing service delivery, drawing on existing research and practical experience.

#### ***2.1.2 Significance of the Study***

##### ***2.1.2.1 Theoretical Significance***

Given that the impact of demographic changes on educational development is becoming increasingly pronounced amid declining fertility rates, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the nexus between demographic shifts and early childhood education development. By focusing on integrated ECEC services—which extend the scope of kindergartens to younger age groups—and broadening the research perspective to include children aged 0–6, this study enriches early childhood education theory and provides an analytical framework for future research on integrated ECEC.

##### ***2.1.2.2 Practical Significance***

This study focuses on integrated ECEC services in kindergartens. By revealing the current status and challenges of these services, it provides an empirical basis for decision-making regarding kindergarten transformation; it also guides the professional development of kindergarten teachers, as integrated ECEC services require teachers to transition from “preschool teachers” to “ECEC educators”—serving as both caregivers and educators; simultaneously, it further promotes the refinement of policy documents and optimizes the policy design for integrated ECEC services.

## ***2.2 Research Approach and Methods***

### ***2.2.1 Research Approach***

This study begins by systematically reviewing demographic data and key policy documents to contextualize the research. Based on existing literature, it examines the current state of integrated ECEC services in kindergartens across four dimensions—teaching workforce, curriculum and activities, environmental design, and evaluation systems—to analyze existing challenges and propose targeted strategies for each dimension.

## **2.2.2 Research Methods**

### **2.2.2.1 Literature Review**

This study conducted systematic literature searches on CNKI and other academic databases, reviewing relevant monographs, journals, and documents on integrated ECEC services in kindergartens. On CNKI, Chinese-language literature was retrieved using the keywords “integrated childcare and early childhood education,” “kindergarten,” and “low birth rate,” while international research findings were sourced through foreign-language databases such as Web of Science. Ultimately, relevant domestic and international research findings and gaps were distilled to provide analytical strategies and supporting evidence for the study.

#### **2.2.2.2 Data Analysis Method**

During the literature review phase, data analysis was employed. Content analysis was used to delve deeply into the implications of the literature, distilling research methods, core conclusions, and key findings, which were then evaluated and integrated within the theoretical framework.

## **3. Literature Review**

### **3.1 Definition of Core Concepts**

#### **3.1.1 Low Fertility Rate**

In demography, the birth rate is defined as “the ratio of the number of births during a given period (usually one year) to the average population during the same period.” A low birth rate, in turn, refers to a demographic phenomenon in which the birth rate remains at a low level over a long period, insufficient to sustain simple population replacement. Yang Juhua defines a low birth rate as “a state in which the number of births in a country or region remains persistently low over a certain period, leading to slowed or negative population growth”[9]. According to data published in the *China Statistical Yearbook 2025*, China's total fertility rate in 2024 was 0.98—falling below 1.0 for the first time and reaching an extremely low level globally[10]. In the context of this study, “low birth rate” specifically refers to the new demographic situation characterized by four consecutive years of negative population growth beginning in 2022.

#### **3.1.2 Integration of Child Care and Early Childhood Education**

“Integration of early childhood education and care” is a key policy concept in the field of early childhood education in recent years. Although the *Encyclopedia of Education* does not directly include an entry for “integration of early childhood education and care,” it defines “early childhood education” as “education for children from birth to school entry,” thereby providing a theoretical basis for this integration[11]. Hong Xiumin defines it as “the coordinated planning and integrated management of childcare services for children aged 0–3 and early childhood education for children aged 3–6, thereby achieving the transition and integration of these two stages”[12]. Liu Yan argues that “integration of early childhood education and care” refers to the unification of preschool education in terms of planning, operational systems, and management mechanisms, including resource sharing, the integration of teaching workforce, and the continuity of educational goals and content; this model is not only a social phenomenon but also a systematic stage in the educational process, reflecting the holistic and dynamic nature of educational reform[13]. This study adopts the definition proposed by Hong Xiumin and focuses on the practice of kindergartens extending their services to provide childcare for children aged 0–3.

#### **3.1.3 Integrated ECEC Services**

“Integrated ECEC services” represent the practical implementation of the policy concept of “integration of early childhood education and care.” Li Minyi and Wang Hui define these services as “services provided by kindergartens to infants and toddlers aged 0–3 and their families, including childcare and early development guidance”[14]. The National Health Commission's *Management Standards for Childcare Institutions (2020 Edition)* classifies integrated ECEC services into four types: full-day care, half-day care, hourly care, and temporary care[15]. This study adopts the definition proposed by Li Minyi et al., specifically referring to full-day or half-day care services provided by kindergartens to infants and toddlers aged 0–3.

### **3.2 Current State of Research at Home and Abroad**

#### **3.2.1 Research on the Integration of Child Care and Early Childhood Education**

Since the 1980s, the field of early childhood education abroad has gradually shifted toward the integration of child care and early childhood education, combining the education and care of infants and young children aged 0–6 into a unified educational system. Currently, the integration of childcare and early childhood education in China is in its early stages, and scholars hold divergent views on its conceptualization. Yu Yongping argues that “integration” does not mean “uniformity”; a “nursery class” in a kindergarten does not equate to the integration of childcare and early childhood education. True integration must be based entirely on the well-being of children, and we must scientifically understand the differences and connections between the 0–3 and 0–6 age groups[16]. Liu Guoyan points out that “the integration of childcare and early childhood education” should be interpreted in depth from two dimensions. From a longitudinal perspective, it emphasizes considering and planning early childhood education for children aged 0–6 as a unified whole; from a horizontal perspective, it aims to strengthen close ties among multiple stakeholders—including childcare and preschool institutions, families, communities, and relevant social organizations—to provide continuous care and education services for children aged 0–6, thereby maximizing educational outcomes[17].

China and other countries differ in the institutional development and implementation of integrated childcare and preschool education. Internationally, services for children aged 0–6 are highly valued, and some developed Western countries, whose laws, policies, and practices are regarded as models, align closely with international organizations. In contrast, China started late, lacks a societal consensus that childcare under 3 is a public service, and has long experienced fragmented and uncoordinated services. Current challenges include high costs, uneven quality, and insufficient teacher competence, which hinder preschool education development. In recent years, China has issued policies such as the Guiding Opinions to provide institutional safeguards, and many scholars have reviewed international experiences to inform the development of China's integrated model.

#### **3.2.2 Research on Integrated Childcare and Early Childhood Education Services**

The policy development of integrated childcare and early childhood education services differs between China and other countries. Research on this topic began earlier abroad; the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) noted in its *Starting Strong* series of reports that Nordic countries such as Sweden and Denmark have already achieved unified management and service integration for childcare and education for children aged 0–6[18]. Curricular activities are a key component of integrated childcare and early childhood education services. International scholars emphasize that integrated childcare and early childhood education curricula should follow the developmental patterns of infants and toddlers; the OECD notes that such curricula should focus on real-life contexts, play-based learning, and individualization, while avoiding the premature introduction of structured academic content. Chinese scholar Hua Aihua points out that current research on the development of infants and toddlers aged 0–3 primarily originates from the fields of medicine and psychology, with a relative lack of research from an educational perspective, resulting in insufficient “educational content” in childcare curricula[19].

The physical facilities of integrated childcare and early childhood education services play a crucial role in infants' and toddlers' development. International research emphasizes the implicit influence of the environment on their development; studies have found that the environmental design of childcare facilities should adhere to three key principles: safety, appropriateness, and exploration. Domestic scholars primarily focus on the practical challenges of renovating the environments of kindergartens that offer integrated childcare and early childhood education.

There is a significant body of research internationally on evaluation systems for childcare services; the OECD emphasizes that process-oriented quality has a more direct impact on children's development, whereas domestic research on evaluation systems for integrated childcare and early childhood education is still in its exploratory phase[18].

#### **3.2.3 Research on the Teaching Staff for Integrated Child Care and Early Childhood Education**

Currently, pre-service education for teachers in integrated child care and early childhood education classes in China still focuses primarily on early childhood education for children aged 3–6. Before entering the profession, these teachers have not received specialized training in the care of infants and toddlers aged 0–3, resulting in a shortage of “specialized” teachers in integrated kindergarten classes. Based on a summary of existing research, the current issues facing the childcare class teaching workforce

include: a shortage of high-quality teachers; low overall quality and insufficient professional competence; low entry barriers, chaotic management of certification, and a lack of professionals committed to long-term career development; high staff turnover and a lack of career appeal; inadequate in-service training that lacks continuity and depth; and a lag in talent cultivation by educational institutions. Regarding research on the professional competency development of teachers in integrated childcare and early childhood education kindergartens, most Chinese scholars have adopted a quantitative approach. Liang Min and Lian Jiaxuan developed an evaluation framework for the core competencies of teachers in integrated kindergarten-nursery programs, covering three top-level indicators: “Professional Philosophy of Care and Education,” “Professional Knowledge of Care and Education,” and “Professional Competence in Care and Education.” Overseas scholars have primarily focused their research on the professional skill development of early childhood educators, classroom practices, interactions with children, and the impact of these factors on the quality of early childhood education[20].

Internationally, teacher training for toddler classes is recognized as the foundation of professional development, with practice and internships as essential components. In-service training supports lifelong learning, effectively enhancing teacher-child interaction quality, and increased outdoor education training also proves valuable. Rising standards demand greater educator professionalism, though crisis drills have limited impact on other competencies. In China, research on integrated nursery-kindergarten teacher training largely overlooks teachers' own development, emphasizing social and educational value instead. Pre-service training suffers from outdated curricula, weak practice, and a focus on vocational colleges over undergraduate programs. In-service training lacks 0–3 specific content, systematic support, and sufficient curriculum resources.

### **3.3 Research Review**

In summary, research on integrated childcare and preschool education began earlier in other countries, while research on such services in China is still in its exploratory phase. Research topics primarily revolve around macro-level policies for integrated childcare and preschool education, the specific practices of integrated services, and the teaching workforce. Currently, against the backdrop of a low birth rate, the demand for kindergarten transformation is growing, and attention to integrated ECEC services has increased both domestically and internationally. However, the scope of research remains relatively narrow, and there is a lack of comprehensive analysis and systematic theoretical exposition regarding these services.

## **4. Research Content**

### **4.1 Analysis of the Current Status and Challenges of Integrated Early Childhood Care and Education Services**

#### **4.1.1 Teaching Workforce**

The teaching workforce for integrated ECEC exhibits considerable diversity in supply, demand, age, education, and background, yet remains critically understaffed. During the 14th Five-Year Plan period, the demand for infant care professionals is projected at 3 to 4 million, far surpassing current training capacity. Most practitioners are redeployed from 3- to 6-year-old classrooms, lacking specialized training for 0- to 3-year-old care. Although the workforce is predominantly young and middle-aged with a rising proportion of bachelor's degrees, many still lack the specialized knowledge, hands-on experience, developmental assessment skills, and family guidance capabilities essential for this age group. Training is infrequent and narrow in scope, concentrating on basic care skills while overlooking critical areas such as psychological development and health management. Weak evaluation mechanisms further impede continuous improvement. Combined with limited career advancement, high stress, and inadequate pay, these conditions drive high turnover and instability, ultimately undermining service continuity and quality.

Three interrelated challenges stand out. First, a persistent supply–demand imbalance leaves the system chronically understaffed. Second, a pronounced competency gap exists, as most teachers hold only a superficial understanding of integrated ECEC and lack both theoretical grounding and practical proficiency in 0- to 3-year-old development. Existing training remains too basic and insufficiently specialized to translate into effective practice. Third, inadequate professional protections—low salaries, heavy workloads, and scarce opportunities for title evaluation, research, and career progression—further discourage retention and professional growth.

#### **4.1.2 Curriculum and Activities**

Curriculum and activities are a vital component of integrated ECEC services, yet they currently suffer from unsystematic design and insufficient developmental appropriateness. In most kindergartens, the nursery class curriculum is not tailored to the physical and mental characteristics of children aged 0–3, thus overlooking their unique needs. Content emphasizes care over education, lacking systematic cultivation of cognitive, language, emotional, and social skills, and fails to address the developmental variations across age groups. Activity formats are monotonous, centered on free play with limited guidance, hindering the goal of "learning through play." Play content and materials often replicate those used in preschool classes, which do not match the action-oriented, loosely structured play needs of infants and toddlers, and thus fail to spark their exploratory interest.

These problems manifest at three levels: design, implementation, and support. In design, most kindergartens lack a coherent, developmentally continuous curriculum framework, with poor transition between 0–3 and 3–6 stages and insufficient integration of real-life and play-based elements. In implementation, curriculum delivery is heavily dependent on teacher competence, and most nursery teachers are unable to apply integrated ECEC principles effectively. In support, curriculum resources remain scarce and largely geared toward 3–6-year-olds, making them ill-suited for the developmental needs of children aged 0–3.

#### **4.1.3 Environmental Design**

Environmental design directly impacts infant and toddler development. In China, integrated ECEC spaces emphasize safety and comfort but often lack specificity and integration. Physically, infant class settings closely resemble those for younger preschool classes, failing to account for the physiological and psychological traits of 0- to 3-year-olds. Soft materials are insufficient indoors, and outdoor play facilities are not designed for this age group, compromising outdoor activity quality. Environmental design does not reflect the integrated ECEC concept, with limited resource sharing and poor environmental transition between infant and toddler classes. Psychologically, teacher emotional states and interaction quality affect child development, yet burnout and stress hinder responsive care, while weak collaboration among principals, teachers, and parents prevents a supportive growth environment.

Overall, current design concepts are flawed: they neglect the integration of educational and care functions, fail to incorporate 0-3 needs, and do not follow developmental patterns for free exploration. Layout and resource allocation are not timely optimized, resource shortages persist, and urban-rural disparities impede equitable service development.

#### **4.1.4 Evaluation System**

China's integrated ECEC evaluation system remains in an early exploratory phase. While evaluation importance and standardization are rising, and content and methods are diversifying toward implicit indicators, some institutions combine quantitative and qualitative methods and expand evaluator diversity. However, shortcomings persist: there are no unified policy documents, the system relies on 3–6 preschool standards, clear guidelines and supervision are lacking, and evaluations are perfunctory. Content and methods lack diversity, focusing on tangible indicators (facilities, teacher-child ratios, safety) while neglecting intangible ones (curriculum quality, teacher competence, interactions, child outcomes); teacher evaluations emphasize static certifications over dynamic performance, and most use summative assessments. Evaluators remain mainly government and institutions, with minimal parent and social organization participation, ignoring their feedback and objectivity. Consequently, the system poorly aligns with integrated ECEC's distinctiveness and continuity, underutilizing its potential. Overemphasis on overt indicators and limited methods prioritizes infrastructure over service quality, contradicting high-quality development goals. Evaluation results are rarely applied for improvement, and the lack of multi-stakeholder involvement undermines comprehensiveness and fairness, failing to reflect all needs.

### **4.2 Pathways to Optimizing Integrated ECEC Services**

#### **4.2.1 Building a Teaching Workforce for Integrated ECEC**

To optimize the teaching workforce, governments must balance supply and demand, expand training pipelines, and incentivize universities to offer early childhood and infant-toddler majors. The curriculum should integrate theory, practice, and internships, with special emphasis on 0–3 care skills. Kindergartens should retrain teachers from 3–6 groups through targeted developmental and care training, recruit graduates and education-background professionals, and use short-term contracts or shared staffing to manage enrollment fluctuations. For professional development, a tiered system is needed: novice

teachers receive basic care and emergency training, while experienced teachers access advanced courses in psychology, family guidance, and assessment, plus curriculum design. Training must cover health management, developmental assessment, and responsive care, with evaluation mechanisms that track teaching performance and child progress for continuous feedback. Governments should raise salaries, establish special allowances, include 0–3 performance in title evaluations, and offer research and off-site training. Society should enhance the profession's image, and kindergartens should reduce non-educational tasks and provide psychological support to alleviate stress.

#### ***4.2.2 Optimizing Curriculum Activities***

Optimizing curriculum activities supports continuous development. A unified 0–6 framework should set specific objectives for 0–3, respect individual differences, and emphasize real-life and play-based learning. Education authorities and kindergartens should develop specialized teaching materials and a resource repository. Teachers must implement activities flexibly, design action-oriented, loosely structured play with guidance, and extend learning to homes. Kindergartens should establish review mechanisms and hold regular seminars. Authorities should strengthen oversight, allocate more resources to the 0–3 curriculum, provide suitable facilities, and encourage resource sharing.

#### ***4.2.3 Creating a Safe and Appropriate Integrated ECEC Environment***

The physical environment should meet infants' physiological, psychological, and safety needs, with soft indoor materials and outdoor climbing, sliding, and crawling equipment that balance safety and fun. Play materials must be safe, non-toxic, appropriately sized, exploratory, and regularly updated. Psychologically, teachers should foster a warm, responsive atmosphere through positive attitudes and timely reassurance, which build children's security and belonging.

#### ***4.2.4 Improving the Evaluation System***

To improve evaluation, governments should issue unified policy documents defining objectives, standards, and implementation rules, distinguishing 0–3 from 3–6 priorities to ensure a smooth transition. Evaluation must cover both explicit indicators (facilities, ratios) and implicit ones (curriculum, teacher competence, interactions), using mixed methods, combining formative and summative assessments, and monitoring daily service. A diverse evaluation team should include parents, social organizations, and other stakeholders alongside government and preschools. Evaluation results should inform feedback and corrective actions, with targeted improvements based on identified issues.

### **5. Conclusions and Discussion**

#### ***5.1 Key Findings***

Against the backdrop of low fertility rates, this study examines integrated ECEC services in kindergartens across four dimensions, namely teaching workforce, curriculum activities, environmental design, and evaluation systems, and it proposes optimization pathways. Declining birth rates are the primary driver for kindergartens to offer infant care, as enrollment shrinkage creates survival pressure. Across the four dimensions, challenges vary. For the teaching workforce, a supply–demand gap persists; the workforce is primarily composed of teachers with prior experience working with 3- to 6-year-olds, who lack sufficient expertise in areas such as daily care and developmental assessment for 0- to 3-year-olds. Though educational levels are rising, competencies do not fully align with job requirements, training is infrequent, evaluation is weak, and occupational protections are inadequate, leading to high turnover and low stability, with the major challenges being supply–demand imbalance, competency mismatch, and insufficient safeguards. Regarding curriculum activities, the curriculum lacks systematic structure and age-appropriateness; emphasis is on care over education, activities are monotonous and lack interactivity, and play content largely copies the “small class” model, failing to spark infants' exploration. In terms of environmental design, physical environments are not tailored to integrated ECEC, with poor transitions between “nursery” and “small class” levels, while psychological environments are underdeveloped and teacher burnout and stress hinder responsive care and emotional support. For evaluation systems, issues include misalignment with integrated ECEC features, underuse of evaluation functions, limited application of results, and insufficient stakeholder diversity.

Optimization requires coordinated action on all four dimensions. For the workforce, balance supply and demand, enhance professional competence, and improve occupational safeguards; for the curriculum, establish an integrated framework, improve teachers' organizational skills, and strengthen resource development and sharing; for the environment, create physical spaces suited to infant/toddler

development and foster a warm, responsive psychological climate; and for the evaluation system, develop unified policies, diversify content and methods, include multiple evaluators, and increase utilization of results. The core of integrated ECEC lies in achieving an organic transition between the 0–3 and 3–6 age stages.

### 5.2 Limitations and Future Directions

This study is primarily based on an analysis of literature and policy documents; it lacks first-hand field research data, and the latest practical outcomes have not been analyzed in a timely manner. Furthermore, the scope of the study is limited: while it analyzes the current status, challenges, and pathways for integrated ECEC services in kindergartens, it pays relatively little attention to the target population of these services, and research into the actual needs of infants, toddlers, and parents may not be sufficiently in-depth; As this study takes the kindergarten as a whole as its starting point, it does not fully explore the integration of ECEC services across different types and regions of kindergartens. Future research could conduct long-term, mixed-methods empirical studies on the integration of ECEC services in kindergartens of different types and across different regions to provide more compelling evidence; it could also conduct in-depth case studies; further broaden the research perspective to focus on the needs and experiences of the recipients of integrated ECEC services, thereby offering new theoretical insights; focus on key research questions for in-depth discussion; pay attention to the dynamic development of integrated ECEC; draw on beneficial experiences from both domestic and international contexts; promptly address existing issues; and provide recommendations for improving integrated ECEC services in kindergartens.

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