

A Study on the Current Status of Childcare Teacher Policy and Policy Evaluation in Korea*

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Abstract

This study attempted to suggest the future direction of policy for childcare teachers in Korea by examining and evaluating the legal status of childcare teachers, the flow of childcare policies, and policies related to improving the treatment of childcare teachers by period. For this, the related laws, press releases, and basic mid-to-long-term childcare plans were analyzed by examining the respective home pages (websites) of the 「Child Care Act」 and the 「Early Childhood Education Act」, as well as those of the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health and Welfare, the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family, the Presidential Committee on Aging Society and Population Policy, and Central Childcare. In conclusion, the childcare policies up to now have the strong characteristic of being marginal efforts to improve the poor working environment and compensation of childcare teachers rather than being a fundamental solution for the long term. Accordingly, it is necessary to prepare a fundamental and long-term policy that can more realistically reflect the childcare teachers' policy demands.

Keywords : childcare, kindergarten, teacher, policy

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Introduction

Childcare teachers in Korea play a major role in the protection and education of infants and young children. As duties occur in the education environment and require childcare planning and professional development for this purpose, despite a difference in occurrence, there are actually no significant differences to the responsibilities and duties of a kindergarten teacher (Park & Ko, 2008; Choi et al., 2015). However, since the departments in charge of childcare teachers and kindergarten teachers are separate, childcare teachers are under the management of the Ministry of Health and Welfare, while kindergarten teachers are under the management of the Ministry of Education. Despite the fact that the subjects of childcare and education are infants and young children and that required policy elements are similar, the separate management systems raise various problems. Accordingly, during the Park Geun Hye administration, in order to integrate early childhood education and childcare, the Infant and Child Education: Childcare Integration Promotion Team was launched in February 2014. The integration effort included improving the integrated teacher qualification system, so there were attempts to integrate childcare teachers and kindergarten teachers. However, with the arrival of the Moon Jae In administration, policies to promote the integration ceased and, in accordance with the movement to directly hire social service workers, such as childcare teachers, nursing care workers, and disability assistants, the joint qualification system with kindergarten teachers was discontinued with little likelihood of being reinstated.

Discussions on the integration of the kindergarten teacher and childcare teacher qualification systems began for a variety of reasons, but, at the center, were the poor working environment and treatment of childcare teachers (Rhee & Kim, 2019). Childcare teachers are considered to work in a poorer working environment and receive lower compensation than kindergarten teachers and childcare teachers believe that they are not generally recognized as experts. According to the 2015 National Childcare Survey, the average working hours of childcare teachers totaled nine hours and 36 minutes per day, exceeding the eight hours per day guideline suggested by the 「Labor Standards Act」 and, thus, totaling 48.3 hours per week, more than the daily working hours of a kindergarten teacher (Kim et al., 2015). Nevertheless, the monthly salary of a childcare teacher was 700,000 less than that of a kindergarten teacher, with allowances also showing a difference of about 200,000 won (Kim

et al., 2015). Not only are working hours and monthly wages poor, but there are also problems with the physical working environment.

In kindergartens, 77.1% had rooms for teachers and 96% were equipped with personal computers, whereas for daycare centers, 43% had childcare teachers' rooms and 65.6% were equipped with personal computers. Likewise, study results show that there are relatively fewer daycare centers compared to kindergartens and that the physical environments in which childcare teachers find themselves are also poor (Kim et al., 2015). In addition, 64.7% of nursery teachers experienced injuries resulting from work, while 72.6% answered that “I just endure tolerable illnesses without making an issue” (Kim, 2013). This result is in line with the findings of Kim et al. (2015), which indicated that 62.2% of respondents said that they “endure illnesses or handle them personally”. As such, these situations reflect the reality of the poor working environment and how childcare teachers are treated poorly. Accordingly, the government has recognized the problems of poor working environments and the poor treatment of childcare teachers and has devised various policies to solve them. Therefore, this study compares the legal status of childcare teachers with that of kindergarten teachers and examines the flow of childcare policies and policies for improving the treatment of childcare teachers by childcare-policy periods. In addition, by evaluating policies for childcare teachers, this study intends to suggest future directions for them. This will allow other countries to use Korea's policy examples for childcare teachers as benchmarks or best practices when planning and establishing ECEC policies.

Method

In this study, to examine the legal status of childcare teachers, flow of childcare policies, policies related to childcare teachers, and related laws, press releases and basic mid-to-long-term childcare plans were analyzed by examining the home pages (websites) of the 「Child Care Act」 and the 「Early Childhood Education Act」, as well as those of the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health and Welfare, the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family, the Presidential Committee on Aging Society and Population Policy, and Central Childcare. Specific research questions for the study's purpose are as follows:

First, what is the legal status of childcare teachers?

Second, what is the flow of childcare policy?

Third, what are the policies related to childcare teachers by period?

Results

Legal Status of Childcare Teacher

In accordance with Article 2 of the 「Child Care Act」, a “childcare teacher” is a person who is in charge of childcare for infants and toddlers in a daycare center, in health care, or in consultation with infants’ and toddlers’ guardians, as well as managing and operating the daycare center. Along with other employees, they are collectively referred to as “childcare staff”. In contrast, kindergarten teachers are divided into teachers and staff in Article 20 of 「the Early Childhood Education Act」, with teachers defined as consisting of a director, a principal, senior teachers, and teachers. Accordingly, Kim et al. (2015) reported that while childcare teachers perform their duties as teachers, they are separate from other staff, that is, dietitians, nurses, and administrative personnel. Thus, with no well-defined descriptive terms for the group, the ambiguity of their work is increased, which undermines the establishment of identity. Therefore, an argument can be made that the terms need to be redefined as “childcare teachers” and “employees”.

In addition, legal bases for childcare teachers and kindergarten teachers differ. Childcare teachers are based on the 「Labor Standards Act」 and the 「Child Care Act」, but kindergarten teachers are based on the 「Early Childhood Education Act」, the 「Basic Education Act」, the 「Special Act for the Improvement of Teacher Status」, the 「Private School Act」, and the 「Education Public Officials Act」(Kim et al., 2015). Therefore, compared to kindergarten teachers, childcare teachers have legal rights to receive reeducation, obtain teacher expertise, to demand work-condition improvement, and living security, welfare, and welfare systems, just like kindergarten teachers, but there is no legal guarantee for their status as a teacher, nor is there the privilege of immunity against arrest (Kim et al., 2015; Kim et al., 2018).

Flow of Childcare Policy¹

Korea's childcare program started with childcare for low-income children in 1921 and, currently, the third basic mid-to-long-term childcare plan (2018-2022) has been established. Specifically, it started as part of the childcare program of the Taehwa Christian Social Welfare Center in Seoul in 1921 and the relief programs for poor children, such as the Symbiosis Daycare Center in Busan and the Grace Daycare Center in Daegu in 1926. Without particular legal foundations, it operated on the basis of childcare policies at the national level, beginning with the enactment of the Child Welfare Act in 1961. At that time, the daycare center was recognized as a legal child welfare facility, leading to the creation of different types of child welfare facility, child welfare administrators, the child welfare facility authority, the basis for subsidy support, standards for the establishment of childcare facilities, standards for employee placement, childcare hours, and the details of the care, among other things. In 1981, the 「Child Welfare Act」 was completely revised and became the 「Child Welfare Act」 and childcare programs were implemented based on the updated law. In 1982, when the 「Early Childhood Education Promotion Act」 was enacted, early childhood education and childcare were clearly classified and daycare facilities came under the responsibilities of the Ministry of Home Affairs, with an associated changing of the name to “Saemaul Nursery School”. The transition of childcare policy from “child custodianship” to the current “childcare” was established when the 「Child Care Act」 was enacted in 1991. From this, childcare policy was expanded to cover all targets, moving away from the concept of childcare for low-income families and working mothers, and the department in charge of childcare was unified under the Ministry of Health and Welfare.

The basic mid-to-long-term childcare plan in Korea consists largely of the “New Sprout Plan”, which is the first basic mid-to-long-term childcare plan, and the “Loving Child Plan”, which supplemented the first, second, and third basic mid-to-long-term childcare plans. The “Sprout Plan” (2006-2008), which was the first mid-to-long-term childcare plan, was

¹ Source. Ministry of Health and Welfare. (2021, April 27). *Childcare policy history*.
http://www.mohw.go.kr/react/policy/index.jsp?PAR_MENU_ID=06&MENU_ID=06400101&PAGE=1&topTitle=Childcare Policy History

conducted mainly by the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family and focused on providing childcare services in response to the increase in women's advancement in society. The “Child Love Plan”, which supplemented the first mid-to-long-term childcare plan was conducted under the Ministry of Health and Welfare from 2009 to 2012, strengthening governmental responsibility for childcare and setting up the childcare services to be centered on “infants and toddlers”. The second basic mid-to-long-term childcare plan (2013-2017) introduced free childcare, including the introduction of the Nuri course, which received much attention from other countries, and support for childcare fees and childcare allowances for all classes (2013), as well as support for programs tailored to consumers. The third basic mid-to-long-term childcare plan, which is currently in progress, is ongoing from 2018 to 2022 and aims to strengthen the publicity of childcare, reform the childcare system to provide effective childcare services, improve the quality of childcare services, and expand parental support.

Policy related to Childcare Teachers by Period

With the revision of the 「Child Care Act」 in January 2015, the state and local governments have established a childcare plan every five years to plan and implement childcare policies for the mid-to-long-term prospects of the supply and demand of childcare.

The first basic mid-to-long-term plan, the “Sprout Plan” (2006-2008)²

The first mid-to-long-term childcare plan, the “Sprout Plan”, was composed of two policy goals and five policy tasks under the vision of “raising healthy children together”. In terms of policies related to childcare teachers, these included the “introduction of [a] basic subsidy system” for “creating a foundation for public childcare”, the “dispersion of childcare facility usage hours” for “providing a variety of childcare services”, and “enhancing the expertise of childcare workers” for “creating a child-centered childcare environment” and improved compensation. The “introduction of [a] basic subsidy system” for “public childcare

² Source. Ministry of Gender Equality and Family Press Release. (2006). *In 2010, the ratio of children receiving support for childcare fees increased to 80.8% - The Ministry of Gender Equality and Family finalized and announced the first mid-to-long-term childcare plan (2006~2010)*. http://www.mohw.go.kr/react/al/sal0301vw.jsp?PAR_MENU_ID=04&MENU_ID=0403&page=599&CONT_SEQ=43714

foundation” aimed to improve the quality of childcare services by linking basic subsidy support to evaluation and certification, childcare teacher salaries, etc. and the “dispersion of childcare facility usage hours” for “providing a variety of childcare services” aimed to increase support for extended-hours childcare teachers by 1,000 teachers every year. Finally, for the “enhancement of specialty and treatment of childcare teachers” for “creating a child-centered childcare environment”, university childcare teacher training courses (credits) were upgraded from 12 subjects for 35 credits to 15 subjects for 42 credits and an attempt was made to induce a salary increase by introducing the national qualification system and linking it to the level of basic subsidies and childcare teacher remuneration.

The “Loving Child Plan,” a supplement to the first mid-to-long-term childcare plan (2009-2012)³

The “Loving Child Plan”, which supplemented the first basic mid-to-long-term childcare plan, presented three strategies and six tasks under the vision of “a world where children and parents are happy”. In the “Loving Child Plan”, for the “improvement of childcare teacher expertise and self-esteem”, detailed policy tasks such as “strengthening childcare worker qualification management” and “improving childcare teacher treatment and working environment” were presented. Specifically, for the “reinforcement of qualification management for childcare workers”, the following, among other things, were included: improvement of qualifications and the training/remedial education system to enhance the professionalism of childcare personnel (2010, October 10); supplementation of systems, such as the time and content of refresher education; the reinforcement of qualification requirements and retraining hours; childcare reinforcement of qualification standards, such as teacher training subjects and promotion requirements; the development of an evaluation system and an operation support system for educational institutions ('10. 2nd half); the preparation of evaluation guidelines and a system for a childcare teacher training center; the dissemination of childcare practice guidelines ('10. 2) and education ('10. 4); video education material production ('10.10) and distribution ('10.12). For “improving compensation for

³ Source. Central Support Center for Childcare, Republic of Korea. (2019, June 20). *I-Sarang Plan 2010 implementation plan*.
<http://central.childcare.go.kr/cccf/community/notice/NoticeSl.jsp>

childcare teachers and working environment”, a cost support policy was planned, such as improving the level of remuneration through readjustment of wages, expanding support for substitute teachers, supporting special allowances, and supporting overtime pay. In 2010, a plan was set up to support 16,000 people (2.9 billion won in governmental support, employing 450 people) with support for substitute teachers to resolve inevitable gaps stemming from vacations for childcare teachers and refresher education ('10.1~). By expanding the support for special service allowances (110,000 won per month) to local childcare teachers, it was intended to support 21,000 people in 2009 (14.1 billion won) and 27,000 people in 2010 (18 billion won). In addition, in the second half of 2010, a plan to support work environment improvement project expense was established for excellent childcare facilities by spending 40 billion won in national expenditure.

The second basic mid-to-long-term childcare plan (2013-2017)⁴

The second basic mid-to-long-term childcare plan presents three strategies and six initiatives under the vision of “a world where children can be happy and parents can be relieved” and tried to create a working environment where the “teacher” works with pride. Among the six tasks to be promoted, the task related to childcare teachers is “creating a high-quality and safe childcare environment”, which deals with the reinforcement of support for the capacity of childcare personnel and improvement of compensation. Specifically, since 2013, qualifications were strictly managed in a step-by-step manner and the reorganization of the teacher training system was reviewed when pursuing integration of kindergartens and childcare. Also, in order to strengthen level-2 qualification requirements, management of the qualifications of childcare teachers was upgraded and strengthened from 12 subjects and 35 credits ('13) to 17 subjects and 51 credits ('14.3). In addition, in order to improve the working environment, an attempt was made to increase the compensation improvement cost for childcare teachers of children aged 0-2 in stages, to expand support for alternative teachers,

⁴ Source. Ministry of Health and Welfare Press Release. (2013). *Preparation of the second basic mid-to-long-term childcare plan*.
http://www.mohw.go.kr/react/al/sal0301vw.jsp?PAR_MENU_ID=04&MENU_ID=0403&page=1&CONT_SEQ=295051&SEARCHKEY=TITLE&SEARCHVALUE=%EC%A0%9C2%EC%B0%A8+%EC%A4%91%EC%9E%A5%EA%B8%B0%EB%B3%B4%EC%9C%A1+%EA%B8%B0%EB%B3%B8%EA%B3%84%ED%9A%8D+%EB%A7%88%EB%A0%A8

and to review the appropriateness of working hours for childcare teachers ('13~).

***The third basic mid-to-long-term childcare plan (2018-2022)*⁵**

In the third basic mid-to-long-term childcare plan, four goals and five policy tasks were proposed under the vision of “a society that works together for the happy growth of infants and children”. Looking at the detailed implementation strategies for each goal, in order to increase the use rate of national and public daycare centers to 40% from the perspective of “enhancing the publicity of childcare”, an attempt was made to lower the local government's financial burden, such as providing labor expenses to local government's self-installed facilities, to improve the conditions for the expansion of local governments and public and balanced arrangements (~'22). In addition, in expanding support for public daycare centers To provide services at the national and public levels (~'22), a plan was established to increase support standards, such as labor costs, to provide excellent childcare services by securing competent childcare teachers. As for the “childcare system reorganization”, an attempt has been made to introduce the “standard childcare time system”, which is basically guaranteed by the state in promoting the improvement of the childcare support system for daycare centers from 2018. This accounts for the current status of daycare usage and guaranteeing the eight-hour working conditions of childcare teachers. For “improving the quality of childcare services”, detailed strategies for implementation included “enhancing the professionalism of childcare teachers” and “ensuring proper treatment of childcare teachers”. Specifically, the “reinforcement of childcare teacher expertise” promotes obtaining new qualifications for childcare teachers through universities, improves the training courses for childcare teachers through means other than universities, the banking-of-credit-system-based teacher training, and reorganizing the childcare teacher qualification system, centering on the first and second levels, so that implementation of the education of childcare teachers can be considered. The introduction of the departmental system for childcare teachers was considered, such as promoting the resolution of the training system and qualification procedures for children. In

⁵ Source. Ministry of Health and Welfare. (2017). *The third basic mid-to-long-term childcare plan (2018-2022)*.
http://www.mohw.go.kr/react/jb/sjb030301vw.jsp?PAR_MENU_ID=03&MENU_ID=032901&CONT_SEQ=343333

addition, by 2022, in consultation with the Ministry of Education, it was intended to review plans to establish a new qualification for teachers of infants and children that are commonly applied to daycare centers and kindergartens. In order to make the refresher curriculum substantial, improving the effectiveness of education through diversification of the refresher education curriculum ('19), making it mandatory to take offline courses that require practice and group education, improving the composition of the refresher curriculum, such as selective completion of required courses, and the introduction of “daycare center vacation” before starting a new semester, etc. were reviewed ('20). Furthermore, a comprehensive management plan for systematic maintenance training was presented through the operation of a general management institution for maintenance education and evaluation and the management of maintenance education institutions ('19), along with the establishment of a comprehensive management system for the history of childcare teachers and support for annual customized maintenance education ('19).

In order to “guarantee proper compensation of childcare teachers”, the salary level of teachers at national and public daycare centers is to increase to the level of national and public kindergartens ('19~) and wages, such as support for appropriate teacher working environment improvement expenses, will be provided based on consideration of the difficulty of work and the wage level of childcare teachers. Through this, the intention is to ensure appropriate wage payments for childcare teachers by improving compensation ('22) and ensuring appropriate working hours for childcare teachers when reorganizing the childcare system and establishing a system to guarantee payment for overtime work ('19~). In addition, by 2022, the aim is to expand support for assistant teachers to alleviate the burden of homeroom teachers, participate in refresher education, and strengthen the role of support, such as participation in refresher education, as well as support for new semester adjustments, field trips, and childcare facilities for children with disabilities. The intention is to expand and promote such roles. Finally, in order to manage the job stress of childcare teachers and improve job satisfaction, support for psychological counseling, such as visits to daycare centers and making links with professional counseling for high-risk teachers, is strengthened, while legal service support for damage relief ('19), daycare attendance management, application for childcare fees, development of automatable items through computerization ('19), childcare teacher handwriting contests, and awareness improvement promotion videos, etc., have been

established as strategies for raising the self-esteem of childcare teachers and promoting social awareness ('18).

Childcare Teacher Policy Evaluation & Conclusion

Childcare teachers are similar to kindergarten teachers in their duties, as described above, but in terms of job classification and categorization, there is a difference, in that childcare teachers are social welfare-related workers and kindergarten teachers are considered educational experts and related fields (Statistics Classification Portal, 2019, June 18). As a result, childcare teachers face a poorer working environment and compensation compared to kindergarten teachers. Accordingly, in establishing and implementing childcare policies, the Korean government has made various efforts to improve quality and compensation for childcare teachers. The following is an evaluation of the government's childcare teacher policy and discussion of the direction the childcare teacher policy should take in the future.

First, the national and local governments are continually promoting various types of policy support for improving the working environment and compensation of childcare teachers, in order to strengthen the publicity of childcare and improve the quality of childcare services.

Second, the legal basis of the responsibility of the state and local governments for nurturing childcare teachers and improving working conditions was solidified by stipulating in the law, in Article 4, Paragraph 4 of the 「Child Care Act」, that: “The state and local governments should strive to foster childcare teachers and improve working conditions”.

Third, in terms of cost support, there has been a constant striving toward securing competent childcare teachers by raising the support standards, such as labor costs to provide excellent childcare services by 2022, and improving the level of compensation by adjusting wages, such as support for special allowances and support for overtime allowances. Nevertheless, the difference in compensation for childcare teachers by type of establishment is large (Kim et al., 2015; Kim et al., 2014). Therefore, there is urgent need to discuss improvement in the level of compensation for childcare teachers working at private daycare centers and family daycare centers, starting with a policy to improve the salary level of national and public daycare teachers to the level of national and public kindergartens, starting

from 2019.

Fourth, there has been a continued demand for manpower support at daycare centers and there has been a great demand from the field to expand support projects for assistive manpower and substitute teachers. Accordingly, by 2022, the government is expanding the support of assistants to reduce the work of homeroom teachers, as well as expanding alternatives to support participation in refresher education and vacation leave. In addition, it is encouraging to find that a policy that offers practical help to daycare centers has been established by expanding the roles of the fields supported, such as support for adapting to a new semester, support for field trips, and support for childcare facilities for children with disabilities. This support policy for assistant teachers and substitute teachers far exceeds nine hours per day and needs to be continually expanded in the future to ensure working conditions of eight hours per day for childcare teachers who are not guaranteed an appropriate working time.

Fifth, childcare teachers take on various duties and roles, such as parent-related work and event-related work, in addition to childcare work. Also, there is a large amount of paperwork to prepare for evaluations conducted by the national and local governments. Therefore, a simplification of documents to reduce the workload of childcare teachers and expansion of work areas that can be automated through computerization are very effective policies.

Sixth, increasing the number of credits required to obtain the level 2 qualification for childcare teachers from 35 credits and 12 subjects ('13) to 51 credits and 17 subjects ('14) is an important factor in strengthening the professionalism of childcare teachers, while designation of face-to-face subjects and a training period of more than 240 hours for 6 weeks are also the ways of solving the constantly discussed problem of the quality of childcare teachers who are nurtured through various channels (Ministry of Health and Welfare Press Release, 2016). However, compared to a kindergarten teacher who must complete 72 credits or more (50 or more major courses, 22 or more teaching professions), there is a difference of 21 credits and, when acquiring the qualification as a childcare teacher, it is worth considering whether or not there is a need to do teacher proficiency and aptitude evaluation more than once, emergency response and CPR (cardiopulmonary resuscitation) training more than once, and gender education more than four times (more than two times in a teacher training course of less than three years). In addition, the plan for fostering new qualifications for childcare

teachers proposed in the third basic mid-to-long-term childcare plan is a matter constantly suggested by teachers in the field and experts (Lee et al., 2015) and is considered very timely.

Seventh, the third basic mid-to-long-term childcare plan shows an effort to resolve issues that have been pointed out as difficulties in daycare centers. Considering the reality of daycare centers that are busy preparing for a new semester after a school year is over, reviewing the introduction of “daycare breaks” before the start of a new semester can be effective in helping childcare teachers recover from mental and physical fatigue and prepare for childcare courses.

Nevertheless, the childcare policies up to now share the same strong characteristic of being marginal efforts to improve the poor working environment and compensation of childcare teachers, rather than being fundamental solutions for the long term. Accordingly, it is necessary to prepare a fundamental and long-term policy that can more realistically reflect childcare teacher policy demands.

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