

Research on Universal Childcare System for Children Aged 0-3 Years in Gansu Province

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Keywords: Infants and children; universality; childcare training; childcare system; localization; societal childcare concepts

Abstract: The critical period for the development of infants and young children is from 0 to 3 years old. High-quality and universality childcare services can not only support the growth and development of children but also alleviate the parental pressures of fertility and child-caring. Additionally, they can contribute to the successful implementation of the "second child" and "three children" policies. This paper primarily draws on the experiences of universal childcare service system development in foreign and domestic well-developed areas. It combines these experiences with the development of the childcare service system in Gansu Province. By examining areas such as policy and regulatory support, the transformation of societal childcare concepts, and the positive optimisation of the universal childcare system, this paper presents relevant suggestions. These suggestions aim to provide guidance for the subsequent development of an universal childcare system for infants aged 0-3 in Gansu Province.

1. Introduction

The period from 0 to 3 years of age is crucial for the physical and psychological development of children. According to Erik Erikson's Social Stages of Developmental Stages, we understand that the age of 1.5 is the formative period for an infant's sense of security. During this stage, infants who receive proper childcare and protection tend to develop a more positive and optimistic outlook, while those who do not may become more mistrustful of the world around them. Between the ages of 1.5 and 3, if children can successfully overcome feelings of shame and gain autonomy with the guidance of their parents, they are more likely to develop perseverance character traits. Therefore, providing high-quality and universally accessible childcare services for children aged 0-3 can significantly influence the development of their future positive behavior habits and personality traits. In the current landscape of Chinese society, the issue of population aging is becoming increasingly apparent, and the younger generation is facing greater pressures. Late marriage and late childbearing have become widespread phenomena. In the seventh census, it was observed that in 2022, the birth rate of Gansu Province was 8.47 ‰, with a birth population of 211,000; while in 2021, the birth rate of Gansu province was 9.68 ‰, with a birth population of 241,600^[1]. To alleviate the life pressures faced by the younger generation and the challenges of fertility and parenting, improve the overall fertility rate in society, and support the successful implementation of the "two-child" and "three-child" policies, it is increasingly crucial to provide high-quality,

universality, and standardized childcare services.

Infant childcare institutions refer to facilities that have been registered by relevant government departments and provide childcare services, such as full-day care, half-day care, hourly care, and temporary care, for children under 3 years of age. According to the National Health Care Agency Registration Information System, as of March 2023, there were 30,211 registered childcare institutions in China, including public, for-profit, and non-profit organizations. In contrast, Gansu province had only 203 registered childcare institutions, accounting for a mere 0.67% of the total number of formal childcare institutions in China^[2]. Therefore, it is imperative to focus on enhancing the standardization and quality of infant childcare institutions, with a dedicated commitment to their universal development. This will enable the provision of more affordable, standardized, and high-quality childcare services, ultimately easing the burden on parents and facilitating population growth.

2. Literature review

In recent years, with the ongoing implementation of the "two-child" and "three-child" policies in China, the key to developing the childcare system lies in providing universal childcare services that align with the immediate needs of families. Professor Pang Lijuan emphasized in her article, "Developing an Universal Infant Care Education Service System," that during the process of constructing the childcare system, it is crucial to adhere to the principle of universality. This involves actively encouraging the collaborative participation of all sectors of society, providing the necessary financial support, and developing channels for funding inputs. Additionally, it is essential to focus on enhancing relevant laws and regulations and establishing access standards for childcare institutions. Educators in the childcare industry should be subject to specific requirements and competency assessments, and comprehensive training and evaluation systems should be established for current educators to ensure the sustainable and healthy development of the childcare industry^[3].

Dr. Lv Wu also emphasized in his research the importance of establishing a collaborative promotion mechanism, expediting the development of fundamental standards and norms, and accelerating the establishment and enhancement of standards and norms for emerging and innovative childcare services^[4].

According to research conducted by scholars Ruan Yujia and Mou Yingxue in their article "Governance of Universal Childcare Services in the Nordic Countries and its Implications," it is evident that Nordic countries place significant importance on childcare services and continually adjust and improve them based on specific local conditions through practical experience, thereby gradually enhancing their universal childcare systems. Firstly, their universal policies related to childcare development are early and relatively comprehensive. For instance, Sweden initiated the provision of free full-time daycare services as early as 1944. In 1998, the Denmark Government introduced relevant policies, proposing that municipal governments should assume full responsibility for childcare for infants and toddlers. Additionally, the Norway Government issued its first preschool education program document in 1966, which meticulously outlined the objectives, curriculum content, and quality standards for childcare services, among other aspects. Secondly, while they demand higher quality in childcare services, they have also established more rigorous teacher qualification standards, imposing strict requirements on the knowledge and abilities of childcare educators. This has significantly contributed to the overall quality of childcare. Moreover, they offer training courses for in-service educators to enhance their skills and facilitate the ongoing improvement of childcare service quality. Thirdly, they provide a variety of care service options, including kindergartens, private or public childcare facilities, and family day care. Parents can choose childcare services that best suit their needs. Furthermore, to promote the ubiquity of

childcare services, various countries have established standards for free childcare. For example, Denmark children aged 0-2 can receive up to 32 hours of full-day childcare per week in childcare institutions other than private nurseries. Finally, to ensure the positive and healthy development of childcare services, Nordic countries have established strict supervision and evaluation systems. These systems facilitate the timely identification of issues within the childcare service development process and the proposal of corresponding measures and solutions to advance the construction and enhancement of childcare systems^[5].

In recent years, cities like Shanghai, Nanjing, and Chengdu have also embarked on the construction of universal childcare systems, achieving remarkable results that have significantly propelled the development of local universal childcare services in China. Since 1999, Shanghai has progressively developed an universal childcare system with government and family involvement. It has defined specific requirements for childcare facilities in terms of environmental and site conditions and has continually improved relevant policies. The city has also emphasized the training of childcare service industry personnel, establishing a solid foundation for the childcare service system's development. Since 2011, Nanjing has issued numerous policy documents related to infant childcare and has provided clear provisions for supervisors and managers of the childcare service system, delineating their rights and responsibilities, thus ensuring that childcare development is supported by sound policies. These featured service systems, grounded in national policies and guaranteed by local regulations, have provided full play to the initiative of local governments and clarified the roles of government departments, thereby fostering the sound development of the childcare service system^[6].

3. Results

3.1 Relevant Policies and Regulations Need To Be Improved

3.1.1 The supervision and management of the system urgently needs to be strengthened urgently

Currently, the registration of childcare institutions in Gansu Province primarily follows the guidelines outlined in the "Gansu Provincial Childcare Institutions Setting Standards Rules (for Trial Implementation)"^[7]. These rules provide specific requirements for the establishment of childcare institutions, including site facilities and staff size.

However, the registration and oversight of childcare institutions are primarily conducted by the health department or relevant education departments. There is currently no dedicated department for the specialized management of childcare institutions. As a result, the establishment, management, and supervision of childcare institutions are uncentralised, and there is a deficiency of unified management and supervision.

During the investigation and research, it was found that, apart from some state-established public institutions, there are childcare institutions operating under the label of "childcare" that deviate from relevant policies in terms of course content, scheduling, and teacher staffing. Some of these childcare institutions are situated within private kindergartens. To cut costs, they have preschool education professionals from the kindergarten provide childcare services. However, these teachers have not received systematic training in childcare services, and their expertise in this area is limited. Additionally, some childcare services lack a comprehensive and professional teaching plan and syllabus. Instead, teaching activities are primarily conducted by experienced childcare teachers based on their own knowledge and experience, without the benefit of formal testing, discussion, and practical application. As a result, the courses offered lack a solid theoretical foundation.

Furthermore, a few childcare institutions prioritize profitability and their own income to a greater

extent. Consequently, the actual number of children in childcare classes tends to be relatively large, leading to an unreasonable teacher-student ratio. In the course of providing childcare services, teachers are often assigned additional responsibilities, which places undue pressure on them and compromises the quality of childcare services.

3.1.2 Lack of uniformity of charging standards

Currently, with the exception of non-profit and some public institutions, most childcare facilities operate on a for-profit basis. In common childcare institutions, the monthly fees for each child typically range from 3000 to 4000 yuan, while some centers, particularly those offering bilingual childcare, charge higher fees, with rates reaching 5000 to 6000 yuan per month. To attract more infants and enhance their core competitiveness in the childcare market, those in charge of childcare institutions often focus on different aspects when determining the institutions' development direction. Some institutions prioritize improving the quality of childcare, gradually building a stellar reputation, and subsequently adjusting their pricing standards. Other institutions emphasize the development of institutional culture, investing to create an environment conducive to infants, and selecting appropriate materials, resulting in higher charges. Meanwhile, certain institutions specifically incorporate foreign early education theories to establish their own educational brands, leading to higher fees. High-investment institutions naturally expect substantial returns. As a result, competition within the childcare market has emerged, and this healthy competition can contribute to the positive development of the childcare service industry. However, if this competition deviates from the law of value, it can lead to the creation of detrimental competitive dynamics, resulting in exorbitant childcare fees that are not conducive to the universality development of childcare services.

Simultaneously, from the perspective of parents, due to the prevalence of foreign courses and the inadequate systematisation development of domestic programs, many parents tend to favor foreign courses. In contrast, families planning to have "two children" or "three children" may opt for domestic courses for economic reasons. The significance of parents' attention to the "foreign courses" attribute highlights an issue. In China, childcare service programs tend to heavily rely on foreign curricula, and domestic curriculum services face a significant trust crisis. Over-reliance on foreign courses will inevitably result in increased costs, potentially affecting the government's macro-control of childcare institution fee standards^[8].

3.2 The social awareness of childcare services needs to be improved

3.2.1 Regional differences in the development degree of childcare services are large

Gansu Province covers a vast territory, spanning across the north, south, east, and west, with a relatively dispersed population distribution. This geographical diversity to some extent affects the scale and quantity of childcare development, resulting in regional disparities. According to the child care provider records recorded by the National Health Commission and subsequent statistical results, the distribution of registered child care providers by region of the province as of March 2023 is as follows:

There are 22 registered childcare institutions in Lanzhou metropolitan area, 2 in Jiayuguan City, 10 in Jinchang City, 15 in Baiyin City, 11 in Tianshui City, 12 in Jiuquan City and 24 in Zhangye City. There are 13 registered childcare institutions in Wuwei City, 38 registered childcare institutions in Dingxi City, 25 registered childcare institutions in Longnan City, 13 registered childcare institutions in Pingliang City, 5 registered child care institutions in Qingyang City, 8 registered childcare institutions in Linxia Hui Autonomous Prefecture and 5 registered childcare

institutions in Gannan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture^[2].

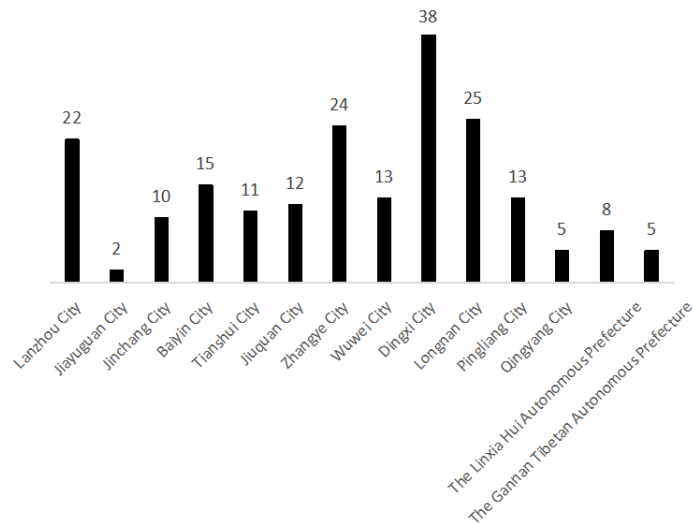


Figure 1: Summary of the Number of Registered Childcare Institutions In Gansu Province

From Figure 1, it is possible to perceive more clearly the quantitative differences in the regional distribution of childcare institutions. Notably, Dingxi has the highest number of childcare institutions, totaling 38, while Jiayuguan city has only 2 childcare institutions. These regional differences contribute to variations in regional childcare rates and, to some extent, reflect disparities in birth rates and economic development across regions. Additionally, from the collected data, it is evident that many childcare institutions operate in urban areas or suburban counties, while the number of childcare institutions in rural areas is relatively limited. Therefore, there is scope for the development of childcare services in both urban and rural areas.

3.2.2 Some parents have biased cognition of childcare

With the implementation of the "second child" and "three children" policies, many families aspire to have "siblings together" or "both sons and daughters." However, the birth of a child often brings long maternity leaves for mothers, and some mothers even have to give up their jobs as a result. This places significant pressure on families. Consequently, when confronted with the dual challenges of family and work, many families continue to rely on grandparents to care for their children at home in an effort to alleviate the pressure of parenting^[9]. Furthermore, some families lack a proper understanding of childcare services. They may mistakenly perceive childcare services as simply sending their child where teachers take care of them. Concerns may arise about the child's young age, their ability to adapt, and potential emotional issues. As a result, when given a choice, these families opt to care for their children at home to avoid what they perceive as "excessive and unnecessary expenses."

Many parents also express dissatisfaction with the quality of childcare services. This dissatisfaction mainly arises from the fact that while many kindergartens offer corresponding childcare programs, these programs primarily target children aged 2-3 years old. According to surveys, a significant portion of teachers in childcare programs have backgrounds in preschool education, with their training primarily focused on educating and caring for children aged 3-6. Consequently, they possess limited knowledge about children aged 0-3 and mainly acquire relevant childcare knowledge through on-the-job experience. Moreover, the curriculum in these programs often adheres to the Learning and Development Guide for Children aged 3-6 years old^[10], this

childcare services are lack of specialization.

In contemporary society, people generally receive higher levels of education, and many parents with elevated cultural literacy possess a deeper understanding of fertility and child-rearing compared to the past. Currently, the childcare service landscape is characterized by varying levels of quality, with some deceptive advertising and inconsistent practices eroding the confidence of some parents in childcare institutions^[11]. Consequently, following the birth of their children, some parents are more inclined to personally care for their children and actively participate in their entire growth process. They believe that this increased parent-child interaction will foster greater intimacy. However, they may overlook the significance of professional childcare services in children's social development.

3.3 The systematization of childcare service itself is not obvious

3.3.1 Large industry personnel mobility and uneven service quality

Since the inception of the childcare service industry, a persistent issue has been the mismatch between teachers' efforts and their income. The childcare service industry primarily focuses on providing education and childcare for children aged 0-3, addressing families' concerns about childbirth and child-rearing, affording more parents the opportunity to seek employment, and easing the economic challenges of parenting. However, in practical terms, the childcare service industry has often been perceived as a mere service occupation. This misconception has contributed to a lack of parental understanding about the industry, leading to the belief that childcare teachers hold low status, and the childcare industry lacks social prestige. Over time, childcare service professionals have not received due respect for their work, and their salaries have struggled to keep pace with rising living costs. High work pressure, limited salary income, and a lack of social security measures are key factors leading to talent attrition within the childcare industry^[12].

As of the beginning of 2023, statistics reveal that Gansu Province hosts fewer than 10 undergraduate colleges and universities offering early education majors. This shortage of educational institutions has contributed to an imbalance between the number of early education graduates and the demands of the job market. Within existing childcare institutions, in addition to early education graduates, a portion of practitioners have obtained early education certificates through self-study. These practitioners typically lack a formal, comprehensive, and systematic educational background and are deficient in both theoretical knowledge and practical experience. Consequently, they must rely on their individual experiences to address and resolve issues encountered in their work. Furthermore, within the childcare industry, which operates as an on-the-job sector, there is a dearth of systematic knowledge and skills assessments. Professional training specific to early education childcare is limited, with a predominant emphasis on preschool education training. Preschool education training typically centers around the learning and development of children aged 3-6. Early childcare industry practitioners must typically expand their childcare knowledge through self-study or participating in various activities. These factors have resulted in uneven levels of competence and expertise among childcare service practitioners^[13].

3.3.2 The theoretical and systematic development needs to be supplemented

Currently, universal childcare in Gansu Province is in its initial development stage, and many scholars' suggestions regarding the construction of a universal care system remain focus on theoretical. As the system evolves systematically and is influenced by the continuous implementation of various policies and regulations, the development of universal childcare presents both challenges and opportunities. The focal point of future research lies in how to optimize the

system's construction and promote the widespread development of universal childcare in Gansu Province. It is noteworthy that in China practical research in this area has primarily focused on developed regions such as Shanghai, Nanjing, Wuhan, and Sichuan, with relatively limited research conducted in Northwest. Furthermore, the lack of professional sensitivity among frontline teachers has hindered research efforts during practice. Teachers often lack awareness of and sensitivity to research, resulting in a dearth of statistics and research based on firsthand data. This deficit has left the universal childcare system in Gansu Province trailing behind that of more developed areas.

Furthermore, the systematic development of universal childcare services encompasses not only the enhancement of its own system but also underscores its integration within the broader education system. Currently, many childcare services operate as separate entities with limited connections to kindergarten education. This often results in children need transition from childcare to a new kindergarten environment after their childcare experience ends. For children aged 0-3, such significant environmental changes can impact the stability of their emotional security. Considering the emotional state of the child and the potential for separation anxiety, the willingness of parents to enroll their children in short, discontinuous childcare services poses a challenge to the development of childcare.

4. Discussion

Considering the current developmental status of Gansu Province and the challenges encountered during its implementation, this paper proposes that the establishment of an universality childcare system for infants and young children aged 0-3 years in Gansu Province should commence with the formulation of universal policies and regulations. Additionally, there is a need to shift societal perceptions regarding childcare and proactively advance the development of a comprehensive childcare system. The ultimate goal is to create a universal childcare service system that prioritizes the well-being of young children, ensures their access to care, and fosters a willingness among young children to participate in childcare services.

4.1 Support from policies and regulations

4.1.1 Construction of universal childcare policies and regulations

To establish a robust universal childcare system, it is essential to fully leverage the pivotal role of upper-level governance. Local governments at all levels should be urged to comprehensively comprehend and grasp the development of universal childcare services. In the process of advancing childcare services, it is imperative to unwaveringly uphold the principle of state-led responsibility for childcare services. This entails seamlessly integrating the potent impact of policies with the benefits of market operation to enhance efficiency gradually. The ultimate goal is to create a childcare service system characterized as "government-led, socially participatory, and market-operated"^[14].

Currently, most policy documents related to childcare services in Gansu Province's cities primarily focus on "implementation plans" and "specific measures." For instance, documents such as the "Implementation Plan of Promoting the Development of Care Services for Children under 3 years old in Lanzhou City" and "Pingliang City Implementation Plan for the 14th Five-Year Plan to Promote the Healthy Development of Elderly Care Services" emphasize how to provide childcare services more effectively. However, these documents offer limited insights into the comprehensive construction of an universal childcare system.

To address this, government bodies at all levels should maximize their role in overseeing the construction of the universal childcare system. They should emphasize the importance of

universality, formal, and standardized childcare services. Specific and precise provisions should be made regarding the establishment of childcare institutions, their funding sources, and income generation methods. Moreover, it should be clearly articulated that the primary objective of childcare institutions' development is to provide suitable services for the widest possible population.

In the context of ensuring childcare service quality, fee structures for childcare institutions should be flexible and based on considerations such as the institution's investment capital, facility environment, and the overall quality of childcare services. This approach can help prevent the phenomenon of exorbitant childcare fees. In terms of practical implementation, the national healthcare department should take the lead in establishing a collaborative working mechanism involving relevant departments and major industry organizations. This collaborative effort will facilitate the development of various standards and norms while ensuring their consistency and coherence^[4].

4.1.2 Subsidies for universal childcare fiscal taxation

The establishment of an universal childcare system relies on the support of financial departments heavily. To further promote the development of a comprehensive childcare system, the financial department should provide substantial support to the childcare institutions, alleviating its economic burden. The universal childcare system necessitates childcare institutions to devise reasonable fee structures that prioritize both quality and universality childcare from the perspective of ordinary people. On one hand, the financial department can implement flexible tax policies for these institutions, taking into consideration their unique developmental characteristics and operational conditions. This would alleviate financial pressures on the institutions, allowing them to focus on optimizing childcare quality. On the other hand, the financial department can establish a tax system tailored for families with "two children" or "three children" to reduce the tax burden on these families, particularly when a decrease in the working population within families results. Furthermore, to encourage more families to choose childcare services, valuable lessons can be drawn from the development models of childcare in other countries. For instance, offering a period of free childcare services to families with "two" or "three" children can facilitate the timely return of mothers to work and ease family responsibilities. In regions with slower economic development, family expenses can be partially alleviated by providing maternity allowances, childcare allowances, or subsidies to families with multiple children or those facing financial difficulties^[15].

4.1.3 Improvement of the universal childcare management and supervision system

In order to better promote the stable development of the universal childcare system, relevant government departments can establish dedicated management supervision units. These units would oversee various aspects of childcare institutions, including registration, operation, and compliance with regulations, streamlining the management of educational facilities and facilitating the systematic development of childcare services. The specialized management departments would create uniform standards for aspects such as institutional setup, facility arrangements, teacher-to-student ratios, and fee structures. These standards would align with national policies and regional development, offering specific provisions and guidelines for childcare institutions. Simultaneously, regulatory bodies could be established to conduct regular inspections and supervision of childcare institutions. This oversight would enable the prompt identification of issues, allowing for the development of corresponding solutions and improvements in the childcare management and supervision system. Lessons learned and experiences gained from this process would help shape a more suitable path for the development of childcare services that align with local characteristics. Drawing inspiration from international best practices, such as those in New

Zealand, specialized supervisors could be appointed to oversee family daycare services. These supervisors would conduct regular visits to observe and evaluate childcare situations, providing guidance and recommendations to address any challenges or difficulties faced by childcare institutions. Furthermore, it may be beneficial to establish planning and research teams within professional departments. These teams could leverage existing local development experiences and consider variations in economic development to adjust development plans in a timely manner. Additionally, they could strategically plan the placement of universal childcare institutions to enhance the effectiveness and timeliness of plan implementation[9].

4.2 Change of social childcare concept

4.2.1 Popularization of universal childcare concept

According to the United Nations' definition of childcare services, they are described as services that "supplement rather than replace maternal child care." In other words, childcare services are intended to complement the care provided by mothers, especially when mothers are working, by taking on the role of caring for the child and providing support and enhance the positive parental role. However, many older generations tend to perceive childcare services as simple babysitting, overlooking the comprehensive and professional nature of these services. To foster a shift in people's perception of childcare services, it is essential to engage in public awareness campaigns. These campaigns can be conducted at community service centers to explain the distinct characteristics of childcare services and disseminate professional knowledge related to infant care. Emphasis should be placed on the universality of childcare services, encouraging individuals to recognize the benefits of such services and choose a childcare approach that suits their families. This, in turn, will help free up family labor resources, enabling elderly family members to age comfortably while allowing younger generations to focus on their work. In addition to community outreach, public awareness campaigns and parent-child activities can be organized at monthly childcare centers, hospitals, and other locations. The goal is to familiarize people with childcare services, highlight the differences between childcare services and home-based care, and illustrate the advantages of opting for childcare services. By increasing public acceptance and understanding of childcare services, individuals will be more inclined to attempt this option and consider it as a viable choice for their families. Moreover, the government can play a pivotal role in this effort by disseminating articles and videos through various online channels, public accounts, and other platforms. These materials can serve as a positive guide, shaping public perceptions of childcare services and caregivers while elevating their status and importance in the eyes of the public^[16].

4.2.2 Diversified development of universal forms of childcare

The development of the childcare system in China has primarily relied on specialized childcare institutions, emphasizing professionalism and specialization. However, to further promote the universal and systematic development of childcare, a single childcare institution is insufficient. Firstly, we can explore the establishment of simple family-style care organizations within communities, offering half-day and full-time childcare services for families in need. While promoting the concept of childcare, we can also extend assistance to families requiring support^[17]. Secondly, in larger companies and organizations, the company or unit can establish affiliated childcare facilities for their employees, offering appropriate support and services. This not only ensures employee welfare but also helps retain staff members who might otherwise leave due to pregnancy-related concerns. Additionally, childcare classes can be introduced in existing kindergartens, with a focus on enrolling children aged 0-3 years and organizing them into

age-appropriate groups. Early education teachers can be recruited to provide high-quality childcare services for children and families, meeting the demand for family-oriented childcare. Furthermore, considering the diverse demographics of Gansu Province, particularly in its cities and autonomous prefectures, establishing ethnic-specific childcare institutions in areas with significant minority populations would be beneficial. This approach ensures that different ethnicities' unique childcare needs are met and contributes to the overall development of ethnic minorities.

In summary, the development of universal childcare services should align with local customs and environmental characteristics. This approach ensures that children have access to appropriate childcare services that cater to their specific needs.

4.3 The positive development of the universal childcare system

4.3.1 Theoretical formation of childcare system

To ensure the systematic development of universal childcare, it is essential to recognize that childcare institutions and regulators alone are insufficient. Instead, there is a pressing need to proactively nurture a professional workforce dedicated to childcare and early education. This involves creating a substantial pool of prospective teachers who can meet the demands of the childcare services sector. To achieve this, it is imperative to encourage colleges and universities to offer specialized programs in childcare and early childhood education.

Addressing the core challenges of staff shortages and high turnover rates within the childcare service sector is fundamental. It is crucial to ensure a consistent supply of highly qualified childcare and early education teachers who can seamlessly integrate into the industry every year. Moreover, the development and promotion of childcare and early education as a specialized profession should motivate scholars in the field of education to conduct in-depth research. This research should encompass both the theoretical and practical challenges faced by the childcare service sector within the province. Drawing on interdisciplinary knowledge from fields such as psychology, sociology, economics, and management can enhance scholars' knowledge and expertise. This will contribute to the expansion of the theoretical framework of universal childcare and facilitate the development of a systematic childcare theory that embodies the unique characteristics of Gansu Province. Such a theory can better cater to the specific needs of the provincial childcare market.

In alignment with the developmental patterns of Gansu Province, childcare education should be adapted to local conditions in various districts and counties. This approach aims to not only establish a standardized template for a comprehensive childcare system but also serve as a valuable reference for the construction of childcare development systems in Northwest regions^[18].

4.3.2 Improvement of the quality of universal childcare

University childcare and early education programs should aim to cultivate well-rounded professionals who possess moral, intellectual, physical, and aesthetic qualities. These professionals should exhibit a strong work ethic and adhere to ethical standards within their profession. They must also acquire a comprehensive understanding of infant psychological development, medical knowledge, and child care techniques, encompassing basic skills in caring for and nourishing infants and young children. Effective communication, child development assessment abilities, and proficiency in high-quality technical skills relevant to infant childcare should also be emphasized. In addition to rigorous academic coursework, it is crucial to incorporate practical training into the curriculum. Students pursuing childcare and early education degrees should engage in regular internships at childcare institutions during each semester. These internships serve to acquaint students with the specific duties and responsibilities of the childcare service industry. To ensure that

students graduate with both theoretical knowledge and practical proficiency, each student should complete a continuous internship at childcare institutions lasting no less than three months before graduation. Furthermore, educational institutions must maintain a post-graduation connection with their alumni who are engaged in childcare work. This ongoing observation and feedback loop can inform adjustments and improvements to the school's training programs, for the cultivation of childcare service professionals better suited to the evolving needs of society^[19].

To enhance the quality of in-service personnel in the childcare service industry, several key initiatives should be implemented. First, it is imperative to establish an industry access system and set standards promptly. Additionally, the development of an assessment system is essential, one that periodically evaluates the theoretical knowledge and practical experience of in-service personnel. To further professionalize the childcare, a national training plan for infant childcare personnel should be launched, and efforts should be made to gradually implement rotation training for all childcare personnel. To motivate and incentivize in-service personnel, the adoption of a reward mechanism is recommended. This mechanism will ensure that individuals in the childcare workforce remain enthusiastic and dedicated to their childcare responsibilities. Moreover, educational institutions such as colleges and universities can organize lectures and training sessions focused on childcare knowledge. These opportunities will enable front-line childcare service personnel to stay current with industry advancements, continually enhance their childcare service competencies, and contribute to the overall growth and professionalization of the childcare service industry^[20].

4.3.3 The integration of universal childcare and preschool education

Connecting childcare services with kindergartens can alleviate parental pressures, reduce the parental burden of enrollment-related anxieties, and enhance the overall enrollment experience for children aged 0-3. To achieve this, childcare classes can be seamlessly incorporated into kindergartens, streamlining the enrollment process and improving accessibility. In terms of curriculum design, student-to-teacher ratios, environmental planning, and scheduling, adhering to the Standard Rules for the Setting of Childcare Institutions in Gansu Province (Trial)^[7] is essential. These guidelines ensure timely registration and compliance with relevant government regulations. Additionally, kindergartens can offer favorable policies to families seeking continuous childcare services, thereby reducing family burdens and boosting enrollment rates.

5. Conclusion

The integration of childcare services and kindergartens has the potential to foster holistic child development. This approach promotes the acquisition of self-care skills, social competence, and language proficiency among children. Unlike the home environment where children are predominantly surrounded by adults and receive affection from family members, childcare classes facilitate interaction and play with peers under the thoughtful guidance of teachers. Such interactions help children adapt to group dynamics and social life, contributing to the development of a well-rounded and morally upright personality.

Acknowledgement

This work was supported by Gansu Province Humanities and Social Sciences Project “Research on universal childcare system for children aged 0-3 years in Gansu Province (number:22ZC04)”.

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