

Early Childhood Education Trend and Childcare Policy in Korea

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Abstract

This article discusses new trends and issues in Early Childhood Education and Childcare in Korea. It first introduces legal framework for Early Childhood Education and Childcare in Korea, followed by descriptions on the current state of Early Childhood Education and Childcare with a focus on the types of institutions, rates of attendance, and number of education and care institutions. It then describes teacher training curriculum and qualification, family involvement and issues in Early Childhood Education and Childcare Policy Process. Finally implications for the future direction of Childcare Support Policy are discussed.

Key words: Korea, Early Childhood Education Act, Kindergarten, Child Care, Childcare Support Policy

I. Legal Framework for Early Childhood Education and Childcare

1. Early Childhood Education Act

The Early Childhood Education Act of Korea promulgated in January 2004 is an independent legal framework promoting three years of education for children age 3~5 at kindergarten by reviewing and streamlining the existing laws and regulations on early childhood education. The Act provides a basic foundation for early childhood education aimed at balanced and harmonious development of children by establishing a more consistent and systematic nationwide human resource management process starting as early as the pre-school stage.

The Act promotes the following main initiatives: i) one-year free education program shall be implemented and expanded in a phased manner for five-year old children before entering elementary school, and education subsidy shall be provided for three- or four-year old children in low income families; ii) government support shall be provided for full-day kindergarten classes in line with major socioeconomic changes such as the increasing number of families with two working parents; and iii) financial support such as a subsidy for teacher's salaries shall be provided to private kindergartens (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, 2004).

With the enactment of the Early Childhood Education Act, the public education for kindergarten age children is strengthened as more support and attention is given to early childhood education, which has received

relatively less attention compared to elementary or middle school education, and the new measures bring more financial stability to Korean homes as the burden of private education expenses for the children are eased.

2. Infant and Child Care Act

The Infant and Child Care Act enacted in 1991 holds its significance in the fact that it has laid a foundation for building a systematic childcare program in Korea beginning at birth through five years of age. Before the Act was introduced, many different types of childcare facilities were in operation based on different laws and regulations (e.g. a nursery facility based on the Child Welfare Act, workplace nursery and pilot care center based on the Act on the Equal Employment for Both Sexes, and saemaeul nursery based on the Early Childhood Education Promotion Act). The Infant and Child Care Act unified these different care facilities under one regulation, and the matter of childcare, which has long remained under the responsibility of parents and private sector, became part of the government initiative (Rhee, 2007).

However, some have continued to argue for the amendment of the Act as it provided a weak ground for social responsibility to provide a strong public childcare service. The Act reflected the State's reservations in its childcare responsibilities and only stated its passive involvement. As a result, during the implementation phase of the Act, the private sector was at the center of the quantitative growth of childcare facilities in the country. Therefore, the Infant and Child Care Act was amended in January 2004 to include several provisions

emphasizing the public interest of childcare and enhancing the overall quality of childcare services.

II. Early Childhood Education and Childcare System of Korea

Korea's early childhood education has a two-tier system, that is, kindergartens (age 3~5) under control of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology and childcare (age 0~5) facilities under control of the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Family Affairs.

Kindergartens, institutions to prepare children aged three and older for elementary school, are either government-run or privately controlled. Depending on the nature of their founding organization, childcare facilities for preschool children including infants are classified into national/public, corporate, workplace, in-home, parent co-op, and other private facilities.

1. Current Conditions of Kindergartens

Kindergartens in Korea provide half-day, extended hour, and full-day programs.

A half-day kindergarten runs daily activities of 3-5 hours, and an extended hour kindergarten opens for 5-8 hours. A full-day kindergarten is based on daily curriculum lasting longer than eight hours.

In recent years the number of full-day kindergartens has been on the rise. Statistics indicate that as of April 2008, 91% of kindergartens in Korea provide full-day

Table 1 Operation Hours of Kindergartens

Half-day kindergarten	3-5 hours per day
Extended hour kindergarten	5-8 hours per day
Full-day kindergarten	longer than eight hours per day

program, a marked increase from 29.5% in 2002.

As shown in the table below, the kindergarten enrollment rate in 2007 tends to rise in accordance with age increases-19.7%, 34.7% and 56.3% for children aged 3, 4, and 5 respectively. Private kindergartens have a higher enrollment rate than their public counterparts.

2. Current Conditions of Childcare Facilities

Childcare facilities range from national/public to corporate, workplace, in-home, parent co-op and other private childcare centers. These facilities offer extended-hour, holiday, hourly, after/before-school, or full-day programs. As in the case of kindergartens, an overwhelming majority of childcare facilities are run privately. The following table shows their current conditions.

As of December 2007, the total number of childcare facilities is 30,856, 5.7% (1,748 facilities) of which are national or public institutions. Private facilities amount to 42.7% (13,018 facilities) of the entire group. In-home childcare facilities, which have steadily increased since 2000, show the highest spike in number. It is reported that there were 13,184 (42.7%) in-home childcare centers in 2007. With the exception of national or public childcare establishments, various privately-run childcare facilities total 29,108 (94.3%). Therefore it can be said that a considerable increase in the number of childcare facilities in the past five years has been driven mainly by the growth of privately run facilities.

3. Kindergarten and Childcare Teachers

A kindergarten teacher's certificate is granted by the Minister of Education and Human Resources Development on the basis of the Children's Education Law. A childcare teacher's certificate, on the other hand, is granted by the Minister of Health, Welfare and Family Affairs on the basis of the Early Childhood Education

Table 2 Number of Kindergartens and Children's Enrollment Rate (2007)

Classification		National/Public	Private	Total
Kindergartens	Number of facilities	4,448 (53.6%)	3,846 (46.4%)	8,294 (100%)
	Enrolled children	118,422 (21.9%)	423,128 (78.1%)	541,550 (100%)

Source: Education Policy Information Center of Korean Educational Development Institute (2007)

Table 3 Number of Childcare Facilities and Children's Enrollment Rate (2007)

Classification		National/Public	Private	Total
Childcare Facilities	Number of facilities	1,748 (5.7%)	29,108 (94.3%)	30,856
	Enrolled children	119,141 (10.8%)	980,192 (89.2%)	1,099,933

Source: Childcare Statistics, Ministry of Health, Welfare and Family Affairs

Table 4 Comparison between Kindergarten and Childcare Teachers

Classification	Kindergarten Teachers	Childcare Teachers
Legal Basis	Children's Education Law	Childcare Law
Ministry in Charge	Ministry of Education, Science and Technology	Ministry of Health, Welfare, and Family Affairs
Certificate	granted by the Minister of Education and Human Resources Development	granted by the Minister of Health, Welfare and Family Affairs
Minimum Educational Requirement	associate's degree from a junior college or higher degree	high school diploma or higher degree

Table 5 Kindergarten and Childcare Curriculum

Institution	Kindergarten	Childcare Facilities
Name	Kindergarten Education Curriculum (Enacted in 1969, Revised in 2007 for a 7th time)	Standard Childcare Curriculum (Enacted in 2006)
Ministry in Charge	Ministry of Education, Science and Technology	Ministry of Health, Welfare and Family Affairs
Age Group	Children age 3 to 5	Children age up to 5
Areas of Study	5 areas of study (health, social skills, expression, language arts, and exploration)	6 areas of study (physical activities, basic life skills, communication, nature exploration, artistic experience, and social interaction)
Classification	Level difference: Level I and II	Different age groups: children younger than 2, age 2, and age 3 to 5 Level difference: each age group Divided into 3 levels

Law. The following table compares differences between kindergarten and childcare teachers.

As indicated in Table 4, the minimum educational requirement for a kindergarten teacher and a childcare teacher is an associate's degree from a junior college and a high school diploma respectively. Completion of four areas of study-teaching profession, liberal arts, major subject of study, and teaching practice-is required to become a kindergarten teacher. A prospective childcare teacher must complete six areas of study: fundamentals of childcare, development and guidance, childcare education, health and safety, cooperation with family and community, and childcare practice.

4. Kindergarten and Childcare Curriculum

Kindergartens follow a curriculum based on the Kindergarten Education Curriculum that was enacted by the Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development. The Kindergarten Education Curriculum, first introduced in 1969, underwent its 7th revision in 2007. Developed to teach children age three to five, the Curriculum consists of five subjects: health, social skills, expression, language arts, and exploration. The Curriculum can be run on a two-tier system-Level I and Level II-in order to accommodate the difference in the level of children's understanding.

Childcare facilities provide a curriculum grounded in the 2006 Standard Childcare Curriculum. The Standard Curriculum is designed to teach children up to age five, and includes six subjects of study, which are physical activities, basic life skills, communication, nature exploration, artistic experience, and social interaction. Children are divided into three different age groups: children younger than two, age two, and age three to five. Each age group is further broken down into three levels so that each child is adequately educated in accordance with their age and level of understanding.

III. Current Conditions of Early Childhood Education and Care

1. Fewer School Age Children Due to Decline in Birth Rate

The Korean birth rate dropped from 1.78 in 1992 to 1.17 in 2002. The 2005 birth rate fell to a record low of 1.05. Since then, the government has augmented its interest in and support of childcare policy, thereby helping increase the nation's total birth rate. The total birth rate jumped to 1.13 in 2005 and 1.20 in 2006. However, the Korean total birth rate still remains low in view of OECD's average of 1.60.

2. Changes in Family Structure and Values of Korean Society

The present Korean society is undergoing rapid changes in family structure and values. A conspicuous change in the Korean family structure in the past 30 years is a steady rise in the number of nuclear family that centers on a married couple and their unmarried children, and a drastic fall in the extended family where three generations live together (Yu, Seo, Kim & Choi, 2006). A recent increase in the divorce rate and the number of single-parent households has made it more difficult for families to raise children, as bread winning and housework, which was shared jointly between two parents before, falls on the shoulders of one parent.

3. Too Much Early Education

Korean parents' zeal for education has been transforming the nature of childhood from a time of encouraging children to literally enjoy themselves into a learning period in preparation for future competition. The early childhood education craze in Korea is brining about changes in the culture of childhood education to such an extent that hardly any child passes a day without receiving talent education. Currently, 86% of kindergarten children are getting private lessons in Hangeul, math, English, or other subjects (Lee, 2002). Research done in Korea, China, and Japan also have shown that Korean children spend the most time on early childhood activities aimed to foster special talent in addition to regular education (Lee, 2006). This early childhood education, which has sharply grown in the recent years, has not only worked against children but it has also been an enormous burden on household economy.

4. Increase in Women's Employment Rate

For the past 20 years, the number of economically active women rose to 10 million in 2006 from 6 million in 1985, with the female participation rate in economic activities continuously climbing from 1.9% in 1985 to 50.2% in 2006(Korea National Statistical Office, 2007). Accordingly, the employment rate of mothers is also steadily rising. Women in their early 30's, however, tend to leave the labor market due to childbirth and childcare. As a result, the burden of childcare is regarded as the biggest factor in undermining working mothers' economic activities despite a social milieu where women generally engage in vigorous economic activities.

5. Childbirth and Childcare Leave System

Childbirth leave has been established and implemented since 1987. A childcare leave system that allows more than 30 days of leave from work was first introduced in 2001 in order to support the childcare of

workers with infants. Since November 2001, men have been able to apply for this system. As of October 2007, 17,390 workers have been paid 500,000 won per month through the childcare leave system.

Working women are entitled to 90 days of childbirth leave, the first 60 days paid by their employer and the remaining days paid by the government. In reality, however, the rate at which workers utilize childbirth or childcare leave is, if anything, low: only 22.5% of working women who gave birth took leave and 28% of those used childcare leave benefits.

6. Establishing Childcare Facilities in the Workplace

The enforcement ordinance of Childcare Law stipulates that workplace childcare centers be established as a childcare support system for working women. Under Section 1 of Article 20 in the ordinance, any workplace that employs more than 300 full-time female workers or more than 500 total workers is required to provide a workplace childcare center. Still, only 15,124 (1.4%) out of 1,099,933 preschool age children participate in childcare provided by their parents' workplace.

7. Childcare Policy Development Center Operation

In December 2005, the Center for Development of Childcare Policy was established as a policy research institute aimed at conducting comprehensive studies on childcare policy. The center has been run with financial support from the Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development and the Ministry of Gender Equality. In the process, studies on childcare, which had been divided into kindergarten education and childcare, have been done in a more systematic and unified manner.

8. Efforts to Achieve Qualitative Improvement and Standardization of Childcare Support Service

Efforts have been made to strive for qualitative improvement and standardization of childcare support services by introducing an evaluation system for childcare facilities and kindergartens. The evaluation and certification system for childcare facilities, a system inspecting childcare centers on the basis of the evaluation and certification table and guide, was first test-operated in 2005 before being fully introduced. As of June 2008, the number of childcare facilities applying for the evaluation and certification amounted to 11,709, 55.4% of the total 30,856 childcare facilities, out of which only 19.6% passed.

The kindergarten evaluation system was test-run on kindergartens in 2007, and it has been nationally operated since 2008. National or public kindergartens are first being evaluated before expanding to private kindergartens starting from 2010.

9. Childcare Subsidy

Support for children's education and childcare is one of the government's important policy priorities as a measure established to ensure the nation's human resources development and to deal with its low birth rate. The government has instituted both a basic childcare subsidy and various education and childcare subsidies to support childrearing.

● Basic Childcare Subsidy

In 2004, the government calculated the standard cost of childcare required to provide a minimum level of childcare service. However, the calculated standard childcare cost was higher than what parents had been paying. The basic subsidy, therefore, means a difference between the standard cost and the actual cost shouldered by parents, which is covered by the government. In 2006, the basic subsidy was first provided for children two years old or younger in childcare facilities. From September 2006 to February 2008, the basic subsidy for children age three to five was administered as a pilot project in three regions.

● Graded Childcare and Education Subsidy for Low-Income Families

Graded childcare and education subsidy is provided for children of low-income families who are four years old or younger. With the range of beneficiaries gradually expanded, in 2007 the subsidy is being given up to the average income bracket of urban worker households. The subsidy is provided according to different grades based on income levels (five levels) and age.

● Childcare and Education Subsidy for Families with Two or More Children

This subsidy is provided for households who are below the average income bracket for urban workers and who have two or more children attending a kindergarten or a childcare center. Siblings except for the first child are eligible for the subsidy. The government is planning to increase the subsidy rate every year in order to eventually support childcare regardless of a family's income level.

● Free Childcare and Education for Children Age Five

In order to ensure equal opportunity of education, a monthly subsidy of 162,000 won is provided for preschool children of households with income below the average monthly income bracket for urban workers. The free childcare subsidy was given to 70% of all five-year old children in 2007. Starting from 2009, this subsidy is projected to expand to cover households earning 130% of the average monthly income bracket.

The following table shows the number (rate) of children who receive a childcare subsidy for childcare facilities.

As indicated in Table 6, 63.9% of infants and 64.2% of preschoolers(five or younger) attending childcare centers are receiving a childcare subsidy. The following table shows the number of kindergarten children receiving an education subsidy.

The number of kindergarten children receiving an education subsidy is 317,000, or 58.7% of the total kindergarten children.

Table 6 Number of Children Receiving Childcare Subsidy for Childcare Facilities (2006)

Classification	Infants	Children age 5 or younger	Total
Total	223,700 (63.9)	442,943 (64.2)	666,643 (64.1)
Graded Subsidy	186,655 (53.3)	277,212 (56.4)	463,867 (44.6)
Two Children	37,045 (10.6)	26,700 (3.9)	63,745 (6.1)
Children Age 5	—	139,031 (70.0)	139,031 (13.4)

Table 7 Number of Kindergarten Children Receiving Education Subsidy (2006)

Classification	Number of children	% of children
Total	317,000	58.7
Graded Subsidy	162,000	65.2
Two Children	10,000	1.8
Children Age 5	145,809	50.2

10. At-Home Babysitting Service

The Ministry of Gender Equality and Family has been operating a babysitting program in 38 Health & Family Support Centers since April 2007. The program offers 120 hours of babysitter service per month, and currently, there are around 1,300 babysitters registered with the Center and 5,000 families using the service. More than 50% of the users are working parents, and low income families request the service more frequently than other users, which shows that the program has a strong function of supporting the child-rearing efforts of low income families.

11. Shortage of Support Measures for Working Parents, Including Working Married Couples

The reality in which coexistence of work and family is impossible has been pointed out as the factor that not only lowers women's participation in economic activities but also lowers childbearing by fertile women. As part of the policy to prevent childbearing age women from leaving the labor market and to support the coexistence of work and family, measures such as the maternity protection system, setting up childcare facilities at the workplace, and tax benefits, have been enacted and revised, but actual implementation has been sluggish. Therefore, these measures need to be enhanced and there must be more active utilization of them.

12. Poor Working Conditions of Private Kindergarten and Childcare Center Teachers

The working conditions for private kindergarten teachers and childcare teachers are very poor, and this directly affects the quality of early childhood education. The excessive working hours, in particular, is an obstacle to raising the level of education and care quality. The compensation is also very low compared to the work intensity, time, and expertise level required. Therefore, it is imperative to reevaluate the compensation of private kindergarten and childcare teachers.

13. Problems with Childcare and Education for Farming and Fishing Village Infants and Preschoolers

The farming and fishing village regions, with low child population and low income, have been alienated in terms of having access to high-quality early childhood education and childcare. Creating farming and fishing communities with a good nurturing environment for children is significant from the point of contributing to the balanced development of the nation as a whole.

According to 2006 statistics, the majority of institutions in the farming and fishing regions are public kindergartens (81.9%), but the enrollment rate (45.1%) is very low compared to the number of institutions.

Short attendance period, long school breaks, and lack of school bus service are among the reasons for not choosing public kindergartens. Seen nationally, compared to the population of children in the farming and fishing villages, there are not enough childcare facilities, and thus an increase in such facilities is urgently needed.

14. Shortage of Comprehensive Services for Handicapped Children

According to the 2001 data from the Korea Institute for Special Education, 2% of infants and toddlers ages zero to five are handicapped. As of 2006, 19.8% of the handicapped children are assigned to preschool education centers or childcare facilities, meaning that only one out of five is receiving education and childcare benefits.

IV. Early Childhood Education and Care Policy Process

1. First Phase Childcare Support Policy Plan

In June 2004, the Presidential Committee on Aging and Future Society presented the First Phase Childcare Support Policy Plan at the national agenda meeting. It was proposed that, through a comprehensive approach to preschool education and childcare based on this plan, a universal childcare support program be provided to develop future human resource.

2. Implementation of Nationwide Investigation on the State of Childcare and Early Childhood Education

The first comprehensive nationwide investigation on the state of childcare and early childhood education was implemented in 2004, and through it, the fundamental data for subsequently establishing a scientific childcare policy were compiled. The contents of the national investigation on the state of childcare and early childhood education show the actual conditions of Korea's childcare and early childhood education in 2004.

3. Presentation of the Second Phase Childcare Support Policy Plan

In May 2005, the Presidential Committee on Aging and Future Society presented a comprehensive childcare support policy plan based on the nationwide investigation of the state of childcare and early childhood education. The Second Phase Childcare Support Policy Plan, following the First Phase Childcare Support Policy Plan presentation, determined the direction of childcare policy and established the specific support methods.

4. Announcement of the Government's First Phase

Basic Plan for Low-Birth Rate Aging Society (Seromaji Plan 2010)

The First Phase Basic Plan for Low-Birth Rate Aging Society is a basic plan to address the aging society with low-birth rate for the period from 2006 to 2010. The substantial part of the First Phase Basic Plan for Low-Birth Rate Aging Society proposes considering introduction of a child allowance to alleviate the family burden of child rearing and increasing the number of public childcare centers to cover 30% of the total demand.

5. First Phase Mid- to Long-Term Childcare Plan (Sessak Plan) Announcement

The First Phase Mid-to Long-Term Childcare Plan announced by the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family(MOGEF) is the five-year childcare policy plan for 2006 to 2010. This plan has as its policy objectives, "building a foundation for public childcare system," "reducing childcare burden of parents," "providing diverse childcare services," "creating child-centered childcare facilities environment," and "enhancing childcare service management system." With this plan, the implementation of childcare policy, which had been passive in the past, became much more active, and it marked a change in thinking whereby childcare service, which had been focused on low-income family infants and toddlers, is expanded and provided to all children.

V. Future Direction of Early Childhood Education and Care Support Policy

1. Guarantee of Right to Education and Childcare for Underprivileged Infants and Preschoolers

For handicapped and farming and fishing village infants and preschoolers, who had been neglected compared to other children in policies on education and childcare access, the government must expand access to education and childcare and provide support so that these underprivileged children can have a fair start in life.

- Provide more education and childcare opportunities for handicapped infants and preschoolers.

To provide more education and childcare opportunities for handicapped infants, better access to education and care facilities is required. The number of special institutions dedicated to the care of handicapped infants and integrated care facilities embracing both handicapped and non-handicapped children should be increased. More childcare professionals and assistants should be fostered considering the special needs and characteristics of the integrated care centers to provide quality education and care services to handicapped infants and preschoolers. Also, to introduce family centered

support programs, existing social welfare centers in local communities should strengthen their family support programs with a special focus on nurturing parental skills of parents with handicapped children.

- Provide more education and childcare opportunities for infants in farming and fishing villages.

To provide more education and childcare opportunities for infants and preschoolers in farming and fishing villages, kindergartens in elementary schools should take a more active role. More school bus support should be provided to elementary school kindergartens, and in some cases, two or more kindergartens in the nearby area should be encouraged to use the same bus to transport their children. Also, new national and public childcare facilities should be built in the areas with no childcare facilities, and free education and care service for five-year old children should be expanded to include every child in farming and fishing villages. Multi-service community centers should be established to provide a variety of quality childcare, family, and health related services such as infant education and care service, children's after-school programs, resident counseling service, and other educational services.

2. In-Home Nurturing and Support for Working Mothers

For families that prefer childcare at home rather than facilities such as kindergartens and childcare centers, a caregiver dispatch system should be introduced and developed to enable in-home nurturing, and the current childcare support system for working mothers should also be expanded and enhanced.

- Strengthen the childcare support policy for working mothers.

Parental leave payment should be increased. Also, the full amount of employee parental leave benefits should be paid from social insurance for every company so that the financial burden of the employer may be eased when an employee takes a parental leave before or after childbirth.

3. Preschool Children Facilities Expansion and Support

Government policy should support further expansion of public kindergartens and childcare facilities and give more government subsidies to private kindergartens and childcare facilities to secure public service, so that all children, regardless of age, class, and region, can receive safe and high-quality childcare and education services.

- Expand public kindergartens and childcare facilities.

Priority should be given to expanding public childcare facilities in farming and fishing village areas and low-income areas, as well as regions with a shortage of childcare facilities.

To expand public kindergartens, newly establish or enlarge existing annex kindergartens in primary schools, and expand annex kindergartens of 1 to 2 classrooms to 2 to 3 classrooms or more. In addition, of the areas with a kindergarten shortage, the welfare investment priority areas and other low-income class concentration areas should be given priority for establishing public stand-alone kindergartens.

- Support private kindergartens and childcare facilities with enhanced public service.

For enhancing and supporting public service of private kindergartens, introduce a kindergarten evaluation system, and link the evaluation results with the government support currently provided, such as a teaching materials and aids subsidy, a teacher accommodation improvement subsidy, and an all-day program support subsidy. In addition, encourage incorporation of private kindergartens by revising regulations to make the school incorporation process easier.

By clearly presenting the link between evaluation and certification results and financial support, the social responsibilities of private childcare facilities must be emphasized. In the case of private childcare facilities, different grades can be given for a teaching materials and aids subsidy, vehicle operation cost subsidy, and wages subsidy, depending on whether the evaluation and certification standard has been met. Private childcare facilities should also be encouraged to incorporate.

4. Childcare Cost: Rationalization of Support System

Expand the beneficiary group for the existing income-level graded childcare and education subsidy, and increase the support from the existing subsidy focused on public facilities and the low-income groups to cover private kindergartens and childcare facilities and the children using them.

- Enhance childcare subsidy support.

To raise the quality level of kindergartens and childcare facilities, government support is also needed for children using private facilities. Therefore, a basic subsidy should be provided to children attending all kindergartens and childcare facilities. Until 2009, childcare and education will be subsidized for family earning below the average income

of urban workers, graded by differences in income groups. The subsidy for five-year olds will be increased after 2009 to include families earning up to 130% of the average income of urban workers and expanded to cover up to 80% of total children. Exemption of childcare and education fees for handicapped children will be provided to all handicapped children 12 years or younger. For families with two or more children using a childcare facility or a kindergarten, a subsidy will be given starting with the second child.

- Develop early childhood education and childcare subsidy system.

Maintain the current graded education and childcare subsidy system, but develop it further into a system able to provide more balanced and fine-tuned graded financial support between income classes. To do so, rationally apply the electronic voucher system currently under consideration.

In addition, increase citizens' awareness of the government support for childcare by expanding and further developing support for private childcare facilities and kindergartens.

5. Early Childhood Education and Care Service: Raise the Quality Level

In order to raise the quality level of kindergarten and childcare facility services, the public service aspect must be enhanced by linking the evaluation and certification results of private kindergartens and childcare facilities to financial support, and the working conditions of kindergarten and childcare center teachers must be substantially improved by adopting a support system that provides supplementary personnel such as substitute teachers.

- Establish kindergarten and childcare facility evaluation system and draw results.

Implement the kindergarten evaluation system nationwide starting in 2008 and ensure that the evaluation system will lead to improvement of kindergarten education quality level.

Set up a management procedure for childcare facility evaluation and a certification system, and provide support to maintain and improve the quality level of childcare facilities.

- Improve the working conditions for private kindergarten and childcare center teachers.

A system or atmosphere must be provided so that a teacher can use childbirth leave or vacation during the year. Further, since private kindergarten and childcare center teachers in some instances receive only a minimum wage, a teacher compensation and

benefits plan that adequately takes into account the amount of hours worked and expertise of teachers needs to be established.

- Introduce support personnel delivery management system to improve working conditions of teachers. The average working hours for teachers are over 10 hours a day, and in order to abide by the 8 hours labor rule, regular teacher aids need to be supplied. In addition, substitute teachers are also needed.
- Improve preschool teacher qualifications system. The standard for preschool teacher qualifications should be the same as the primary and middle school teacher qualifications and be unified into one standard. Currently junior college graduates make up the largest proportion of childcare center and kindergarten teachers, and the academic qualifications should be gradually raised to four-year college degree or higher level. Official certification and issuance, management, and administration of teacher qualifications approval will be handled by a single government body, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology. Such unification of administrative work will enable efficient teacher qualifications management.
- Restructure the two-tier system of kindergartens and childcare centers. Establish a department at the central government level to handle coordinated preschool education,

and restructure the administrative system to eliminate administrative waste and disorder due to overlapping of ages and functions of kindergartens and childcare facilities. In addition, overlaps between support of childcare and education provided by different agencies and childrearing support policies must be linked together so that service can be implemented under a system of close cooperation.

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