

Ongoing Process of the Integration of Kindergarten and Childcare of Korea

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Abstract

The integrating effort, which has been tried in Korea, by the governments of four presidents from 1998 to 2017 has been described in this study. The integration of this study means uniting kindergartens and child care centers under one Ministry. The purpose is to clarify what kinds of problems the divided system could cause young children and what has been done. The analysis of documents such as records of the Blue House (president's office), the Prime Minister's Office, Ministries, and research articles in terms of integration was applied. Research found that problems of the divided system of kindergarten and child care center in Korea can be placed in three categories – inefficient administration governance, duplicated budget allocation and its inefficiency, and quality difference of early education and care for the same age group. Integration was started first by the Minister of the Ministry of Gender Equality (MOGE), Chi Eun-hee of the Kim Dae-jung government in 2003. The Roh Moo-hyun government moved child care administration from the Ministry of Health and Welfare (MOHW) to MOGE in 2004, but the Lee Myung-bak government moved it back to the MOHW in 2008. The MOHW vigorously tried to integrate the two institutes under it as soon as they had it back, but failed. The Ministry of Education (MOE) of the Lee Myung-bak government integrated the two national curriculums and named it NURI Curriculum, which was applied to five-year-olds first in 2012 and then to children of three- and four-year-olds in 2013. At present, children attending either kindergartens or child-care-centers benefit from Local Government Financial Assistance Grants. Lastly, the Park Geun-hye government decided to continue the Lee government's policies, NURI curriculum, and free education with the Local Government Financial Assistance Grant. In addition to this, her government made an integration agenda in 2014, which consisted of 10 projects. 8 out of 10 projects had been achieved by 2015, and two projects, integrating teacher education and certificate system of both institutes, and uniting two institutes into a Ministry are remain to be achieved.

Keywords: : integration of kindergarten and childcare, the Ministry of Gender Equality (MOGE), the Ministry of Health and Welfare (MOHW), the Ministry of Education (MOE)

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Introduction

Up to the 1980's, ordinary Korean families and the government did not consider early education and care for children under 5 years old imperative. The Korean yangban-class recognized the effect of early education by establishing Gyungsung kindergarten in Hanyang (the old name of Seoul) in 1913 in order to give their youngsters an opportunity to become accustomed to modern Japanese culture. However, it gave ordinary Koreans a strong prejudice against kindergarten education, by making them think that it was only for the children of the rich. However, an American missionary, Miss Charlotte Brownlee, who was hired by Ewha Womans University in 1914, started Ewha private kindergarten with 16 young Korean children from poor families, who were wandering the streets (Ewha Kindergarten, 2018). Even after independence from Japan in 1945, this kind of prejudice continued so that by the 1980s, less than 1% of five-year-olds attended private kindergartens. There were four public kindergartens in Seoul and one in Busan, which were only started in 1976.

On the other hand, child care centers were started because of the urgent need to take care of war orphans, and also young children from the lowest income families whose mothers had to work for a living in the 1950's. So, there has been a tacit consensus that child care centers are for children of rather needy families. Because of this prejudice, most policies the Korean government has been applying were for the sake of these working mothers. The lack of public transportation also makes it more difficult for parents to take their children to kindergartens or child care centers on their way to work. However, three economic factors in 1985 changed the situation drastically; lowered value of the dollar against the Korean Won, the low oil price, and the very low interest rate set by the Korean government. These gave the best chance for improving economic development in Korea's history (Cho, 2018). Around this time, almost all families in Korea could afford a car to carry young children conveniently, and also a lot of new working places became available for young mothers because of the labor shortage.

The extremely active Women's Liberation Movement of the time motivated young women to get into the professional job market. As the number of highly educated young working mothers increased, their demand to the government to provide better quality places

for their young children became fiercer. However, the ways to interpret their needs differed greatly between women's liberation leaders, social welfare professionals, and ECE professionals. That was the very reason why serious conflicts arose among the interest groups who pursued the integration of kindergartens and child care centers. The feminist leaders and social welfare professionals interpreted young parents' needs in terms of more child care centers for working mothers, whereas ECE professionals interpreted parents' needs as having a quality education for their young children. The research questions of this study are as follows:

1. What are the problems of the divided system for young children under 5 years old in Korea?
2. What happened regarding the integration of the kindergarten and child care systems from 1998 to 2017 in Korea?

Problems of Divided System

The researchers who specialized in economics and administration expressed concern over the administration ineffectiveness, the duplicated budget allocation, and its inefficient management (Choi, Park, Ha, & Kim, 2016; Ryu, 2014). Specialists in child development and early childhood education (Rhee, Kim, Shin, & Moon, 2008) described how the divided system created a quality difference in curriculum and teaching (Hong, 2014; Lee, Ryu, & Lim, 2018; Park, 2014). These three categories will be described separately under the subtitles of ineffective administration problem, inefficient and duplicated budget allocation problem, and the problem of quality difference in curriculum management.

Ineffective administration

As can be seen in Figure 1, the MOE, which governs kindergartens for young children aged 3-5 according to the Early Childhood Education Act (Ministry of Education [MOE], 2017), and the MOHW, which governs Child Care Centers for 0-5-year-olds and also Family-type child care centers for infants aged 0-2 according to the Child Care Act (Ministry of Health and Welfare [MOHW], 2018), are inevitably giving different quality services to children as well as to parents. Comparing the administration system of the MOE for kindergarten with that of child care centers in terms of quality, these two institutions are affected considerably by two different administration systems. Most of all the MOE has

been developing the ECE administration system for more than 30 years. The first Early Childhood Education Sector with only one Kindergarten Education specialist, who shared an office with the Elementary School Education Department, was established in the MOE in 1982 at the request of the Blue House, which wanted to increase the number of kindergarten children up to 50% from 1% even only for the 5-year-olds. So, the MOE gradually increased the number of ECE administration sectors under the Elementary School Education Department at local Education Offices of county level as well.

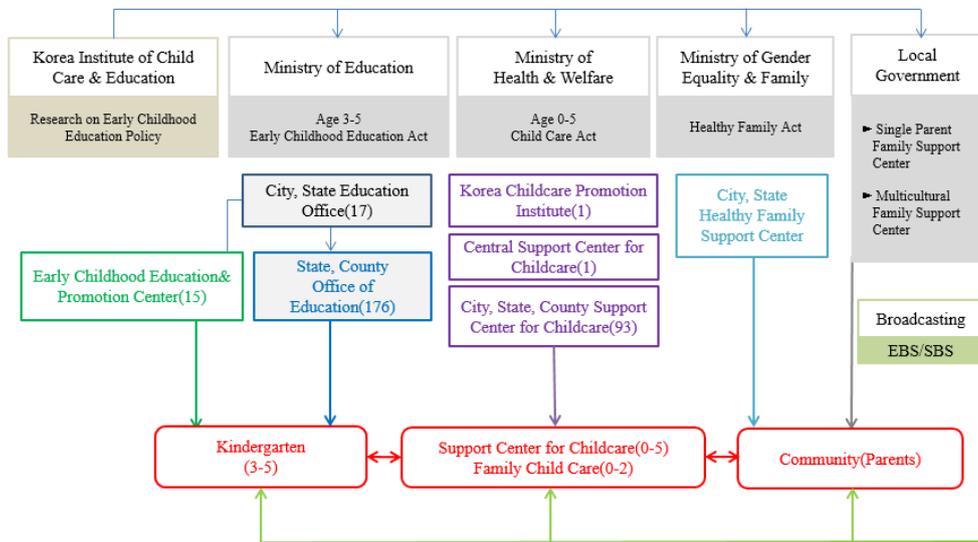


Figure 1. Korean Government Support System for Kindergarten and Care-Center

At present, the MOE has one central ECE Department and two independent ECE Departments at Seoul Metropolitan Education Office and Gyeonggi-do (state) Education Office. In addition to the two independent ECE departments, there are 176 ECE Sectors under the Elementary School Education Departments at the Education Offices at county level. According to the statistics of the MOE of March 1, 2018, 40 Kindergarten Education Inspectors and 207 Deputy Commissioners of Kindergarten Education, which makes a total of 247 ECE public servants, are consulting and supervising kindergartens nationwide (MOE, 2018).

As can be seen in Figure 1, the MOHW does not have this kind of administration system

which could assist teachers to provide quality early education and care even though it has one Korea Childcare Promotion Institute at the central government level, one Central Support Center for Childcare in Seoul, and 93 Support Centers for Childcare at City, State, and County level. The functions of these supporting systems are mainly to do research, in-service programs, etc. for child-care-takers and parents. There is no system or staff to supervise the quality of ECE services. They do not function educationally like the ones under the MOE, and it is not legally compulsory for them to do so, which causes quality gaps between kindergartens and child care centers in terms of quality ECE services.

Budget allocation in terms of political power and its inefficiency

One year after the Child Care Act (MOHW, 2018) was passed in 1991 by the Parliament in collaboration with politically progressive leaders such as women's liberation activists and social welfare specialists, the budget for the child care centers was steeply increased from a zero base, but not for the private kindergartens. For example, the Government subsidy for child care centers in 1992 was 40 million US dollars, which was the first budget allocation for child care centers, but in 2004 it was raised to 358 million US dollars, which was about 10 times more. Comparing the budget increase of the child care centers with that of private kindergartens, no government subsidies were given for a decade even though tuition is rather high for parents (Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development [MEHRD] & Korea Educational Development Institute [KEDI], 2005, 2009). The significant increase of the budget allocation for the private child care centers was possible whenever a president from the progressive political party was in power, since the welfare of low income families is their main focus.

However, private kindergartens, which have been educating young children for more than 100 years without proper financial assistance from the government, started to push the MOE and the Parliament in collaboration with ECE professionals who realized that a law, Early Childhood Education Act, is an essential basis to get government subsidies. The ECE Act was passed by Parliament on January 8, 2004. After the ECE Act, which defines kindergarten as a school just like elementary and secondary school, was enacted from 2005, the MOE could start not only supporting private kindergartens systematically and financially from 2007, but also the MOE could establish public kindergartens extensively,

especially for low income regions where there were no private kindergartens (Rhee, 2004; Rhee, Rhee, Chun, & Kang, 2017).

The budget for kindergartens has been increased from 79 million in US dollars in 2005 to 2,685 billion US dollars in 2013, which is about 33 times more than that of 8 years ago. Since then, the speed and the total amount of the MOE budget for young children have been increasing more than that of the MOHW during the administration of the 17th president, Lee Myung-bak, since the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)'s strong recommendation to increase quality institutes for young children motivated the Korean government. According to the OECD, the budget allocation for early childhood education by the Korean government in 2011 was only 0.3% of the GDP, which was half of the average 0.6% of the OECD member countries (OECD, 2014).

Another example of inefficient budget management of the divided system is duplicated research institutions performing similar functions under each Ministry: the Korea Institute of Child Care and Education (KICCE) under the MOE and the Korea Childcare Promotion Institute (KCPI) under the MOHW. As it could be seen in Figure 1, the KICCE was founded in 2005 as an organization mainly to perform research into Early Childhood Education and Care. The purpose of KICCE is to supply research results and information whenever the MOE, the MOHW, and the MOGEF as well as Local Governments require. However, 4 years after the establishment of the KICCE, the MOHW established the Korea Childcare Promotion Institute (KCPI) in December 2009. Naturally, the researches of both institutes are duplicated. At present, the KCPI adds various programs: evaluation of child care centers, granting of child care-giver licenses, providing in-service training programs for them, and quality control of public child-care-givers, etc. (Korea Institute of Child Care and Education [KICCE], 2016), which are duplicated with the roles of the MOE. From the economic professionals' point of view, taxes are wasted by maintaining divided research institutes with similar functions (Hong, 2014; Ryu, 2014).

Quality differences between kindergartens and child care centers

It is hard to quantify the quality difference between kindergartens and child care centers. However, parents are becoming aware of the quality differences of teacher's educational background, their teaching attitude and skill, and difference between the National

Kindergarten Curriculum of the MOE and the Standard National Child Care Curriculum of the MOHW (Choi & Shin, 2015; Chung & Park, 2017). The differences of educational environment such as playground size, various interest corners in classrooms for exploration, educational materials, and supervision quality of both institutes are some other examples. In addition to these, only kindergarten children could experience exotic special activities at Early Childhood Education Promotion Centers (ECEPC) of 15 Education Offices in the big cities, as shown in figure 1, which cannot be provided by individual institutes because of the expense, lack of knowledge, and lack of practical experience. Children in child care centers do not have the opportunity to use ECEPC. The most important and critical gap between the two institutes is different teacher qualification of both institutes and staggered salary criteria for their similar work.

Attempts of Integration from 1998 to 2017

International Year of The Child, 1979, proclaimed by the UN, stimulated the Korean government and public to recognize the importance of quality early education (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund [UNICEF], 2019). The Korean government in the 1980's aligned with this phenomenon by extending the budget for young children, which was possible because of the rapid economic development at that time (Local Educational Financial Statistics Information System [LEFSIS], 2018).

Establishment of the Ministry of Gender Equality in 1998

When the late President Kim Dae-jung (1998-2003) was elected, Korean feminist leaders, including the President's wife, Ms. Lee Hee-ho, who was the head of the feminist leaders in Korea at that time, succeeded in launching the Special Committee for Women's Rights under the presidential office on February 28, 1998, pursuant to Article 3 of the Government Organization Act (Ministry of the Interior and Safety, 1998). The Committee had existed for three years, two years before the President Kim finished his term; then, the committee was elevated to the Ministry of Gender Equality (MOGE: at present the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family) on January 29, 2001. Even though it has not been publicly announced, it was the starting point of the integration of kindergartens and child care centers.

The first attempt to integrate under the MOGE

The first attempt was announced at the Cabinet Council Meeting by the Minister of the MOGE, Ms. Chi Eun-hee on April 4, 2003. She suggested at the meeting that all the young children from 0-4 in child care centers and 3-4-year-olds children in kindergartens should be integrated under the MOGE. At the same time, a congressman of the progressive political party proposed either to change the entrance age of the elementary school from 6 to 5 or make a new K-grade for them (Rhee, 2004). After the Minister and a congressman announced this publicly, the MOGE and feminists prevented the ECE Act bill from being passed by Parliament, since the law will legally prove that kindergarten is a regular school system, and to integrate kindergarten under the MOGE is impossible. Just before the voting the Minister of the MOE, Dr. Ahn Byung-young and the Minister of the MOGE, Ms. Chi Eun-hee, were busy visiting and persuading each congressman to cast a vote for their side. On January 8, 2004, 188 congressmen out of 212 in the Parliament voted for the Early Childhood Education Act, which was 7 years after the bill was submitted. Five months later, the MOGE gave up integrating kindergarten with child care center under it, quickly amended the Child Care Act on June 12, 2004 to move its administration to the MOGE (Rhee, 2004), and then started administering the child care centers right away.

The second attempt to integrate under the MOHW

The second attempt to integrate both institutes under the MOHW was started right after the next President Lee Myung-bak (2008-2013) was elected in December 2007 (Lee et al., 2018). He immediately announced that the child care center administration would be given back to the MOHW from March 1, 2008. However, from the moment the news was publicized, some congressmen of the opposition political party along with professionals in social work, professionals of child development, and leaders in the child care fields acted vigorously to integrate child care centers and kindergartens under the MOHW. According to the agenda of these advocates, young children aged from 3 to 4 who were attending kindergartens of the MOE should be cared for together in child care centers either with their younger or older siblings for the convenience of working mothers. In addition to that, a proposal to send all the five-year-old children to the elementary school as first graders was put forward again, which was the same concept as the proposal of the MOGE's first

integration agenda. The second attempt became a politically controversial issue again. This time, the advocates had two rationales. First, the higher intelligence level of the five-year-old children at present compared with that of the same aged children in the past proves the necessity of learning academic subjects earlier at the elementary school. Another reason publicly mentioned in 2008 was that there were more than enough child care centers to take care of all the children of 0 to 4 without spending extra budget on establishing new child care centers.

When the news appeared in the media, the ECE professionals were dismayed at first because banning the integration of kindergartens and child care centers under the MOHW looked impossible for two reasons. First, because right after President Lee Myung-bak moved the child care administration back to the MOHW, the agenda was proposed. If it was the result of negotiation between two political sides, conservative and progressive, it would not be possible to protect kindergarten as an educational system. Second, the Presidential Council for Future and Vision (PCFV), which was launched at the request of President Lee Myung-bak, suggested solving the integration problem by not only sending 5-year-olds to the elementary school as first graders, but also by shortening the elementary school academic year from 6 years to 5 years, which was suggested as a national level policy by the Council. In addition to this, almost all of the congressmen of the progressive political party welcomed the second integration proposal. Surprisingly, parents and reporters, who had become knowledgeable about the importance of developmentally appropriate education for young children during the controversial debate in the past decade, criticized the second integration attempt of the social welfare professionals, since it would shake up the whole national educational system from kindergarten to university again (Bae-Suh, 2012; Kim & Kim, 2008). And it was literally impossible to amend all the related laws such as the Education Act, the Early Childhood Education Act, and the Child Care Act at once before the new academic year began. More or less, the advocates could not present any concrete research evidence to show that transferring kindergarten from the MOE to the MOHW was a better policy in terms of the future of Korea. In fact, in those days, many OECD member countries, especially Scandinavian countries which used to have integrated institutes for young children under the health, related ministry for more than 100 years and transferred them to the MOE (OECD, 2014). Also, redeploying public

kindergarten teachers whose social status as public servants was legally protected as long as they did not violate the laws was a big social problem to solve according to Article 14 of the Education Law (MOE, 2017). So, the second attempt of the integration by social welfare professionals also failed. Up to this point, the Korean government has succeeded in extending both kindergarten and child care center in quantity, but not in quality.

The third attempt to integrate two National Curriculums by the MOE

The third integration was begun step-by-step by the MOE by not focusing on which ministry the two institutes should be integrated into. Instead, the MOE focused on the importance of quality education and care for the same aged group of young children. The third integration attempt by the MOE was begun with organizing a research team, Five-Year-Research for the future of Korean young children, ECE and Care (Chung, Na, Park, & Ha, 2008). It was suggested by the minister of the MOE, Dr. Lee Ju-ho, who worked for the Korea Development Institute for a long time as a researcher and assemblyman. He recognized the necessity of improving the effectiveness of tax management and giving a quality early education and care service equally to the same aged children.

The research team analyzed the new trend of early childhood education and care of the OECD countries in order to find the direction in which Korea should be heading (Chung et al., 2008). According to the report, the MOE proposed a policy of educating all the 5-year-old children in both kindergartens and child care centers with the National Common Curriculum as a Basic Education instead of sending them to the elementary school as first graders as proposed by the Presidential Council for Future and Vision, since the policy to shorten the elementary school year from 6 years to five would not only be inappropriate for young children's development, but also would shake up the whole educational system completely. When President Lee received the research results from the MOE, he agreed publicly on making a National Common Curriculum for five-year-old children and publicly promised to start giving vouchers to parents of five-year-old children to pay a partial amount of tuition for private kindergartens and private child care centers as a first step. This policy was enacted from March 2012 for five-years-old only by giving parents voucher cards, Enjoy Card for kindergarten parents, and Love Card for child care center parents.

Parents received about 180 US dollars monthly in 2012 after they chose an institute. At first, it was fine, but when some parents moved to other areas and had to change the institute, for example, from kindergarten to child care center or vice versa, they found that using different card is really inconvenient.

The study, Five-Year-Research for the Future of Korean Young Children, ECE and Care (Chung et al., 2008) was very important research for young children due to the researchers' recommendations to the government such as teaching with an Integrated National Common Curriculum for all young children aged from 3-5 whether they are attending kindergarten or child care center on the condition that directors have to hire either kindergarten-teacher-certificate holders or the first level child care taker's certificate holders, which was a great step forward in terms of quality early education and care. President Lee Myung-bak signed the agenda of making a National Common Curriculum and extending 9 years of free education for the elementary and secondary school students plus one more year for the five-year-olds, which will make ten years of free education. He publicly announced that Early Childhood Education is the responsibility of the government. Then on May 2, 2011, Prime Minister Kim Hwang-sik publicly announced again to the public that five-year old children would be educated with the National Common Curriculum and would enjoy free education like elementary school children and middle school students from March 2012, which was the historical moment. Actually from March 2012, financial support from the Local Government Financial Assistance Grants through the MOE was given to parents of both institutes even though only for part of the tuition. And then the voucher has been given to parents of 3- and 4-year-old children from March 2013 with the Local Government Financial Assistance Grants (LGFAG). The difference between Government Subsidies (GS) and LGFAG is quite large. GS, which was given to the children aged 0-5 in the child care centers until 2011 and to the kindergartens irregularly until 2007, was unstable because the annual budget would be differently allocated by a regional government according to its political variations and the economic situation at the time. LGFAG is stable, since the percentage of the budget is fixed by law. At present, the government has to allocate 20.27% of the annual GDP to the MOE for the subjects of free education (Woo, 2014). The private family type care centers from 0-2 still have to negotiate with their regional government every year to get GS. In order to get enough GS, leaders of the family-type child care

centers have to negotiate not only with the MOHW, but also with members of parliament and the municipal council every year.

The MOE organized a committee led by the president of the Korean Society for Early Childhood Education, Dr. Lee Jung-wook, to integrate the National Kindergarten Curriculum of the MOE, which had been modified regularly since 1969 and the Standard Curriculum for Child Care Center developed by the MOHW in 2007. Meanwhile, the MOE invited the public to make a new name for the National Common Curriculum. The NURI Curriculum, which means the light of the world, was selected from 5,603 suggestions from the public and was revealed to the public on 14 July 2011. The five-year-old children both in kindergartens and child care centers were educated with the NURI Curriculum from March 2012 and for the three- and four-year-old children from March 2013. It can be described as the most important historical step toward the integration of kindergartens and child care centers (Park & Park, 2015). When the 18th President Park Geun-hye took office from March 2013, her government made an agenda for the integration.

The fourth integration attempt

Park Geun-hye (March 2013 to April 2017), the 18th president, mentioned at the meeting of the Preparation Committee for the Presidency the necessity of ‘integration’. Newspaper reporters of Back (2013) and Park (2013) wrote about the president Park’s strong desire to integrate kindergartens and child care centers before her sovereign power is over. According to the minutes of the policy briefing meeting of the Blue House on April 14, 2013 after two months she began her role as the 18th president, she required Cabinet members to minimize people’s confusion when they made policies on integration; she said, “Even though ... integration of early childhood education and care system ... is a future aim the Korean government should achieve ... Find a way, which would be effective to integrate for the sake of the well-being and convenience of young children and parents” (Cheong Wa Dae Public Relations Office, 2013, para. 6).

The Prime Minister of the Park Geun-hye Government, Mr. Jeong Hong-won, instructed the Office for Government Policy Coordination (OGPC) under his Office to integrate kindergarten and child care center. The first thing the OGPC did was to organize the Executive Committee for the Integration (ECI) which consisted of public servants, ECE

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professionals, child development specialists, and social-welfare professionals on May 22, 2013. After serious arguments about the pros and cons, the Committee decided to maintain the policies which were applied during President Lee Myung-bak's regime. The Chairperson of the ECI stated at the first meeting that the purpose of the integration was to improve the quality of early education and care in various areas. Table 1 is the agenda for the integration with 10 tasks, which was planned to be achieved in three years, from 2014 to 2016 (Park, 2014).

Table 1. *The Agenda of the 18th President's Government for the Integration of Kindergartens and Child Care Centers*

The First Stage (2014) Quality Improvement	(1) Integration of voucher card management system , Love Card of child care and Enjoy Card of the kindergarten in one. (2) Integration of both institutes' different information opening systems to the public on the internet. (3) Integration of assessment instruments of both institutes in one format, since child care center measurement was more complicated. (4) Allow kindergartens to accept infants aged from 0-2 and make an integrated national curriculum for them. At present 0-2 infants are supported financially from the government subsidies.
The Second Stage (2015) Integration of Rules, Facility Standards, Curriculum & Management	(5) Integrating different facility standards of the two institutes in terms of quality. (6) Improving rules to restrict the upper limit of tuition of both private institutes-kindergarten and child care center. (7) Parent- and -child- tailored care for working mothers who cannot take care of infants aged 0-2 at home. (8) Integrating or consolidating the two different financial regulations.
The Third Stage (2016) Integration	(9) Integration of the teacher education system, integration of different types of teacher- certificate, and integration of graduated teacher's salary scale. (10) Integration of Ministry, integration of financial resources , and integration of the related laws.

The first stage (2014) consisted of 4 specific tasks: (1) integration of voucher card management system, Love Card of child care center and Enjoy Card of kindergarten in one; because of the divided management, parents experienced confusion and inconvenience when they wanted to transfer a child either from kindergarten to child care center or vice versa (achieved and enacted from November 2014); (2) integration of two different Information Opening Systems of Kindergarten/Child care center to the public such as

curriculum, play activities, opening hours, opening days a year, special events, and facilities so that parents could compare and analyze the information; then, parents could select the one which would be appropriate to their needs (achieved and enacted from October 2015); (3) integration of assessment instruments of the two institutes in one format; child care center measurement criteria were more complicated than those of kindergarten, so it was hard for parents to judge and compare items; the ECI evaluated them and cut them in half; the items decreased to 145 items for child care center and 134 items for kindergarten (achieved and enacted from fall 2015); and (4) integration of 0-2-year-old infants with 3-5 year olds in one institute; according to 2015 statistics, 29% of 417 rural areas do not have child care centers to send children aged 0-2. But in 91% (379) of them, there are public kindergartens where infants could be cared for if the integration of both institutes could be done (partly achieved and enacted from 2015).

The second stage (2015) also had four tasks: (5) integration of two different standards for facilities in terms of quality; when the committee discussed the integration of facility standards, the safety of young children and improved classroom environment were the important focus; fire prevention equipment, alarm system, and cooking facilities should be installed; most of all classroom size should be big enough with 2.2 square meters per child (enacted from September 2015); (6) changing limit increases in tuition of private kindergartens, since they charge parents extra tuition even though they receive government financial assistance through vouchers; putting a certain percentage limit on tuition increases by law, the private kindergartens cannot charge parents as much as they wish (enacted from September 2015); (7) parent- and -child- tailored care; working mothers who have to work odd hours before and after the child care centers are closed and also cannot take care of infants aged 0-2 at home could ask directors of child care centers to match their working schedule at certain days and hours (enacted from July 1, 2016); and (8) integrating or consolidating two different financial regulations; the financial regulations for budget management of both private institutes have been the most delicate problem for the MOE as well as the MOHW; ahead of the integration of the Ministry, the MOE and the MOHW planned to fix the financial regulations, since the funds for the vouchers come from tax so that transparent financial management is essential; in order to maintain the financial clarity of both institutes, the MOE made “Edufine system” (enacted from 2017).

The third stage (2016) includes two important tasks: (9) integration of the teacher education system, integration of different types of teacher-certificate, and integration of graduated teacher's salary scale; and (10) integration of Ministry, integration of general financial resource beyond the Local Government Financial Assistance Grants, and integration of the related laws.

When a congressman, Mr. You Eeu-dong, asked the head of the Office for Government Policy Coordination (OGPC) under the Prime Minister's Office on June 27, 2016, which was a few months before the people's political rally against former president Park, about how far the integration of kindergartens and child care centers had progressed, the head of the OGPC, Mr. Lee Suk-jun, answered that up to item 7 in the table above had been finished (Prime Minister's Secretariat, 2016). Actually, the tasks described in (8) were also enacted from 2017. Therefore, the 18th President Park's government who made the integration agenda in 2014, which consisted of 10 projects, achieved 8 projects, so there are still two projects, integrating teacher education and certificate system of both institutes and uniting institutes into a Ministry, left to be solved.

The 19th President Moon Jae-in's government did not say a word regarding the integration of both institutes. Instead, President Moon intends to establish the Social Welfare Service Public Corporation (SWSPC) nationwide, as he promised as a presidential election pledge in 2016. The purpose of the SWSPC is to integrate child-care service, recuperating service for elders, rehabilitation for the handicapped, and health care services under the SWSPC for the sake of improving the quality of social welfare services from young children to elders. It could be defined as an integrated social service (Lee, 2018).

The leader of the National Solidarity of Child Development and Child Care Professionals, Dr. Lim Jae-tak, is concerned that transferring child care centers to the SWSPC would reduce the child care takers' social status and also the educational quality of child care centers (Chung, 2017). He recommends that for the quality improvement of both institutes, kindergarten and child care center, integration under the MOE is more appropriate. The professor of the Child Welfare Department of Sukmyung Women's University, Dr. Suh Young-sook, insisted, "Both parties, who have been quarreling vigorously in terms of their advantages and disadvantages over the past 20 years, finally come to an agreement to be concerned about only young children's appropriate development and benefits of teachers ...

If the SWSPC starts to run child care centers just like other social service matters, then ‘care and early childhood education’ will be divided into two again permanently so that the whole child development will be at risk, and also the child care takers of private child care centers will miss a good opportunity to become qualified teachers just like kindergarten teachers” (para. 7). Suh added that up to the present time, even though many child care takers were trained and educated to function as teachers, they could not get a teacher’s certificate because they belonged to the MOHW. Putting them under the SWSPC will make their social status that of SWSPC staff not teachers (Chung, 2017).

Discussion

As an OECD member country and as the nation with the lowest birth rate, Korea is facing the most difficult problem to reconstruct its whole educational system before the 2040’s, since it is the era when the number of children in the early years would become half or less (Hong, 2019). Based on the facts found in this study, it could be assumed that there will be too many kindergartens and child care for the number of young children aged 0-5 in the future, so there could be a lot of empty classrooms, jobless teachers and child-care-takers, necessity of closing or changing ECE departments of college and universities, jobless professors, and public servants of Education Offices without positions. So, it is necessary for the Korean government to adjust the early educational system as soon as possible.

Conclusion

The study affirms that the problems of the divided system for the same aged group, especially from three to five, are ineffective administration, inefficient and duplicated budget allocation, and quality difference in curriculum management. These problems could be solved by the integration of kindergartens and child care centers, but need to consider two points as follow.

First, all the policies in terms of young children from birth to five, especially integration of the two institutes, should be made based only on the developmentally appropriate early education. As shown, during the integrating process in the past two decades, young children were taken hostage in the budget battle between ministries or in political power games. Young children's human rights were not respected as a first priority.

Second, kindergartens and child care centers in Korea should be integrated under the Ministry of Education, since it has built the solid network of an administration system in early childhood education for last three decades. The MOE is the one which could educate and care for young children 0-5 developmentally appropriate at this point. If the integration can be achieved in the near future as we hope, giving a new name to a new school for three- to five- year-old children such as either Young Children's School or School for Young Children would console professionals and teachers of both parties and mostly parents and children. And also, a new name for infants aged 0-2 should not be forgotten even though many of them might stay at home with parents or cannot be included as the subjects of free education for a long time; it could be named Nursery School or Infant School.

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