

# Analysis of Talent Development Pathways for Higher Vocational Professionals in the Context of the Integrated Childcare-Preschool Industry

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**Abstract:** With China's socio-economic development and the implementation of the three-child policy in recent years, infant care services have become a hot topic. However, currently, there are only over 4,000 registered infant care institutions in China, far from meeting market demand. According to statistical data, there are about 14 million infants in need of care services nationwide, and the phenomenon of supply failing to meet demand has led to a huge market demand that cannot be met. Therefore, it is necessary to expand the scope of higher vocational talent training, regarding care and preschool education as two key areas. Corresponding majors should be established, recognizing the comprehensiveness of knowledge encompassing pre-school education, medicine and health, and public services to cultivate talents, and improving the quality of teaching. In view of this, this paper explores the cultivation path of higher vocational talents in the context of the integrated infant and preschool care industry, hoping to provide more references for frontline educators.

**Keywords:** Integrated infant and preschool care; Higher vocational education; Professional talents; Cultivation path

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## 1. Introduction

With the improvement of socio-economic levels, parents have put forward higher requirements for the quality of infant and preschool care services. Traditional talent training in infant and preschool care has exposed many problems, such as scattered educational resources and poor connection between educational concepts, which have also deeply troubled teachers and students, making it difficult to meet the needs of modern families for infant and preschool care services and corresponding talent training. The modern transformation and upgrade of integrated infant and preschool care also presents a new solution. This means that majors such as infant care and preschool education must rise to the challenge, adhere to the main position of curriculum teaching, optimize teaching content and teaching modes, and further expand into the second and third classrooms. By improving teachers' ability and quality and deepening the integration of industry and education, the efficiency and quality of corresponding talent training can be fundamentally improved.

## **2. Analysis of the development connotation of the integrated childcare and preschool education industry**

### **2.1. “Dual-track” separated education for childcare and preschool**

In the past, early childhood education institutions in China have long existed in a “dual-track” state. On the one hand, children aged 0-3 entered private early education institutions or public kindergartens with built-in nursery classes, focusing mainly on childcare <sup>[1]</sup>. On the other hand, children aged 3–6 entered kindergartens to receive preschool education that combines childcare with education. In this regard, different institutions offer education services with different orientations, varying greatly in fees, quality, and teaching staff, which can also be described as uneven. In such a field that still lacks unified standards and supervision, there are bound to be institutions oriented towards “fame and profit-seeking,” which is detrimental to the healthy growth and future development of young children.

### **2.2. The rise of “integrated childcare and preschool education”**

According to surveys in 2022, the number of infants and young children in China was around 40 million, with more than 30% requiring childcare services, and the enrollment rate reached 5.5%. Subsequently, the state has issued a series of policies, such as the Guiding Opinions on Promoting the Development of Care Services for Infants Aged Below 3, Opinions on Promoting the Healthy Development of Elderly Care and Childcare Services, Standards for the Establishment of Childcare Institutions (Trial), Management Regulations for Childcare Institutions (Trial), and Care and Education Guidelines for Childcare Institutions (Trial). This marks the rise of “integrated childcare and preschool education” <sup>[2]</sup>. It not only meets parents’ demands for early education and care of their children but also helps improve the quality of preschool education and address the issue of the poor connection between childcare and preschool education. This is an important measure in response to changes in population structure and the growing social demand for high-quality preschool education.

## **3. Current situation of talent cultivation in higher vocational nursing and early childhood education majors**

### **3.1. New demands for employment positions**

The field of early childhood care and education is in great need of professionals who are responsible for various aspects, such as daily care of young children, early education arrangements, and service management. This also means that there are a large number of new positions and demands emerging in the early childhood care and education industry, which must be promptly expanded in the corresponding professional education. For example, childcare workers bear the important responsibility of caring for the daily lives of infants and young children, while also cooperating with teachers to carry out educational activities and maintain class order. Curriculum consultants provide professional advice to parents and develop personalized early education programs based on the development of infants and young children. Operational managers are responsible for enrollment promotion, personnel arrangement, curriculum setting, financial management, and other tasks in early childhood care institutions to ensure their normal operation <sup>[3]</sup>. It should be clarified that the current talent cultivation in higher vocational nursing and early childhood education majors lacks in-depth exploration of certain positions and has not absorbed specialized educational content and forms, making it difficult to cultivate more adaptable talents that match these positions. This has led to difficulties in employment for higher vocational college students and requires deep reflection.

### **3.2. New changes in curriculum construction and teaching**

New changes have emerged in the higher vocational nursing and early childhood education majors, resulting in more and more innovative curriculum models and teaching methods. The nursing major focuses more on the care and nurturing of infants aged 0–3. Students need to deeply study relevant professional courses such as infant daily care, nutrition and feeding, disease prevention and care, responsive care for infants, infant behavior observation and recording, and infant games. On the other hand, the early childhood education major (preschool education) primarily targets children aged 3–6 and delves deeper into educational and teaching courses, such as early childhood education pedagogy, child psychology, and early childhood educational activity design <sup>[4,5]</sup>. However, both majors emphasize the cultivation of students' practical abilities and have added a large number of practical training courses. This also implies that future educational reforms should focus on specific issues, introduce innovative ideas and technologies, and strive to improve the quality of talent cultivation in higher vocational majors.

### **3.3. New models of industry-education integration and school-enterprise cooperation**

Industry-education integration and school-enterprise cooperation are important pathways for higher vocational education to cultivate highly skilled talents. The early childhood care and education majors are also continuously exploring new cooperation models. On the one hand, schools establish close cooperative relationships with early childhood care institutions and kindergartens. Schools provide cooperating units with professional talents, while cooperating units provide students with internships and training bases to allow students to gain experience in real work environments. On the other hand, enterprises deeply participate in the talent cultivation process of schools. Industry experts enter campuses to participate in curriculum development, textbook compilation, teaching evaluation, and other tasks, bringing the latest industry trends and practical experience into the classroom. School teachers will also go to enterprises for attachment training to enhance their practical abilities. In addition, some schools and enterprises jointly carry out scientific research projects, focusing on hot issues in the early childhood care and education industry to achieve the integration of industry, academia, and research.

## **4. Cultivation paths for vocational college talents in the context of integrated childcare and preschool education industry**

### **4.1. Optimize training programs to cultivate professional talents**

In response to the different service scopes of childcare and preschool education majors, the talent cultivation programs should be repositioned to focus on cultivating excellent talents in specialized fields. In particular, it is necessary to cultivate composite talents who meet the needs of “integrated childcare and preschool education,” actively adapt to social demands, establish dynamic adjustment mechanisms, improve the quality of talent cultivation, and prevent an increasing number of vocational college students from falling into the dilemma of employment difficulties. This approach improves the quality of talent cultivation from the source and achieves a win-win situation for education and industry. Specifically, vocational colleges also need to assign teachers and industry professionals to form a dedicated guidance team to research the cultivation of talents in different teacher positions, and adjust the inadequacies of different majors in terms of career orientation, training objectives, and training specifications <sup>[6–8]</sup>. Further promote school-enterprise cooperation and adjust talent cultivation based on industrial demands to truly achieve effective and high-quality talent cultivation. On this basis, it is also necessary to implement customized talent cultivation programs and work with institutions related to the integrated childcare

and preschool education industry to set new courses, new content, and new cultivation paths, to help graduates of various majors adapt to social development trends more quickly and improve their professional recognition, participation, and sense of achievement. Optimizing talent cultivation programs is the first step in the reform of professional talent cultivation paths in vocational colleges, and it is also an important means of clarifying cultivation objectives and repositioning.

#### **4.2. Construct a new curriculum system of “medical care, elderly care, and education” to form a curriculum group**

For childcare and preschool education majors, a curriculum system that synchronizes “medical care, elderly care, and education” should be constructed. In teaching, different focuses under the “integrated childcare and preschool education” industry should be classified to form a dedicated curriculum group system<sup>[9]</sup>. For example, integrate courses such as infant health care, pediatric nursing, infant behavior observation and guidance, and infant early education and family education guidance to allow students to learn more professional knowledge. In accordance with the specific requirements of enriching teaching content and innovating teaching forms, promote an integrated curriculum system of “three lines advancing in parallel and combining care with education” to achieve synergy among related courses<sup>[10–12]</sup>. Based on the conventional “1+X” vocational skill level application, fully combine the actual needs of the work field, the specific content of typical work tasks, the strict norms of occupational standards, and students’ diversified career choices to comprehensively and specifically broaden the “X” projects. Expand its scope to popular fields with broad employment prospects such as child care, maternal and child care, and high-end housekeeping. At the same time, integrate the curriculum standards related to child care, maternal and child care, and high-end housekeeping into the talent cultivation program through scientific and reasonable methods, making them an integral part of the talent cultivation system; alternatively, implement these curriculum standards as separate courses to allow students to conduct systematic and in-depth learning, effectively increasing the composite degree of professional talent cultivation and delivering more high-quality talents with strong comprehensive abilities and solid professional skills to society.

#### **4.3. Strengthen the cultivation of dual-qualified teachers to promote the integrated development of childcare and preschool education**

The “Opinions of the CPC Central Committee and the State Council on Comprehensively Deepening the Reform of the Teaching Staff in the New Era” points out that teachers are an important resource for educational development. To comprehensively improve the quality of vocational education, it is crucial to equip a high-level and high-quality team of dual-qualified teachers. Therefore, vocational colleges should increase training efforts and conduct multi-disciplinary theme training for teachers in childcare and preschool education majors, highlighting the leading role of the core teaching team. Based on the needs of knowledge and skill learning selected after the integration of positions, courses, competitions, and certificates, a professional group teaching team should be formed to implement division of labor and cross-border integration. On the one hand, vocational colleges should actively introduce senior experts in the field of childcare and preschool education, and ensure a steady increase in the proportion of frontline technicians and professionals in related industries such as kindergartens, childcare institutions, and community services by formulating scientific talent recruitment plans and incentive mechanisms to deliver fresh blood to the industry. On the other hand, efforts should be made to improve the construction of dual-qualified teacher teams and deeply promote school-enterprise cooperation and industry-education integration. Vocational colleges can establish long-term and stable cooperative relationships



with well-known kindergartens and childcare institutions to jointly carry out projects such as curriculum development and practical teaching base construction <sup>[13]</sup>. At the same time, actively guide the teacher team to deeply understand the development dynamics of the childcare and preschool education industry, industry demands, and changes in professional positions in the context of “integrated childcare and preschool education,” and encourage teachers to fully participate in frontline education and teaching, management, and research work in kindergartens and childcare institutions, etc., to enrich their experience in practice and cultivate more dual-qualified teams that exceed dual certificates and dual abilities in integrated childcare and preschool education.

#### **4.4. Deepen industry-education integration to improve the fit of talent cultivation**

In the context of the booming integrated childcare and preschool education industry, vocational talent cultivation also faces new opportunities and challenges. Deepening industry-education integration starts from talent cultivation, and school-enterprise parties jointly formulate talent cultivation programs, integrating actual demands with industry development trends to make teaching content closer to actual work. At the same time, strengthen practical teaching links, actively jointly build practical training bases both inside and outside the school, and provide a vast students with real work scenarios and practical opportunities. Establish “schools within factories” on campus, namely school-affiliated childcare and educational institutions, and “factories within schools” off campus, namely sending more teachers and students to participate in external educational internships. This also promotes more students to conduct practical exploration and apply what they have learned to actual production, logistics, services, and other diverse activities, paving the way for the formation and development of excellent professional experience. In addition, schools should encourage teachers to actively participate in practical activities to improve the professional practical ability of teachers in childcare and preschool education majors. By exposure to frontier information, teachers can understand the technology and service requirements in the context of the integrated childcare and preschool education industry and incorporate their experiences into the process of vocational talent cultivation, making the teaching process more vivid and practical <sup>[14,15]</sup>. Deepening industry-education integration is the inevitable choice for vocational talent cultivation in the context of the integrated childcare and preschool education industry. Only through comprehensive measures such as strengthening school-enterprise cooperation, enhancing practical teaching, and improving teacher quality can the fit of talent cultivation be improved, providing more high-quality talents for the transformation and upgrading of the integrated childcare and preschool education industry.

### **5. Conclusion**

In summary, the development of the integrated early childhood care and education industry presents unprecedented opportunities and challenges for the cultivation of talent in early childhood care and education within higher vocational colleges. By analyzing the connotation of this industry’s development, it becomes apparent that the corresponding talent cultivation services provided by higher vocational colleges lag significantly behind the “market.” Therefore, it is imperative to optimize training programs, establish new curriculum groups, promote the cultivation of dual-qualified teachers (those with both theoretical and practical expertise), and deepen industry-education integration. These efforts aim to continuously improve the quality of professional talent cultivation and inject new energy into the development of the early childhood care and education service industry. Moving forward, it is essential to continue to monitor the dynamic changes within the integrated early childhood care and education industry to address new issues and challenges that arise during its development.

## Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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