

Article

Reforms in Preschool Education Systems in Countries Around the World

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Abstract: Preschool education plays a crucial role in the formation of a child's intellectual, social, emotional, and physical development. In recent decades, many countries around the world have implemented large-scale reforms aimed at improving the accessibility, quality, and effectiveness of preschool education systems. This article analyzes the development and reform processes of preschool education in several leading countries, including France, Finland, Germany, South Korea, and Sweden. Special attention is paid to government policies, educational coverage rates, innovative pedagogical approaches, and institutional mechanisms that contribute to the improvement of early childhood education. The study demonstrates that developed countries prioritize universal access to preschool education, the introduction of child-centered teaching methods, and the professional development of educators. The findings highlight that investment in early childhood education significantly contributes to the development of human capital and long-term socio-economic progress. Therefore, strengthening preschool education systems has become a key priority in modern educational policy across the world.

Keywords: Preschool Education, Early Childhood Education, Educational Reforms, International Experience, Child-Centered Pedagogy, Educational Policy, Preschool Coverage, Educational Development

1. Introduction

Preschool education is an essential stage in the overall educational system, providing the foundation for children's cognitive, emotional, and social development [1]. Researchers and educators emphasize that the early years of a child's life are critical for developing fundamental skills such as language acquisition, social interaction, and problem-solving abilities. Consequently, many countries consider the modernization of preschool education as a strategic priority in national educational policies [2]. In recent years, developed countries have implemented significant reforms aimed at expanding access to preschool education. These reforms focus on increasing enrollment rates, improving educational quality, and ensuring equal opportunities for all children. International studies indicate that children who attend preschool institutions demonstrate higher academic performance and better social adaptation during later stages of education. France is one of the leading countries in terms of preschool education coverage [3]. Preschool institutions in France are known as "école maternelle" and are integrated into the national education system. Since 2019, education has become compulsory for children starting from the age of three [4]. As a result, nearly all children aged three to five attend preschool institutions. The French preschool education system focuses on language development, social interaction, and preparation for primary school education. Finland is widely recognized for its high-quality education system, including early childhood education. Preschool education in Finland is based on a child-centered pedagogical approach that emphasizes creativity, play-based

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learning, and social development [5]. Participation in preschool education for six-year-old children is compulsory, and the majority of children aged three to six attend early childhood education institutions. Educational activities are organized primarily through play and interactive learning, allowing children to develop independence and creativity [6]. Germany also has a well-developed preschool education system known as the “kindergarten” model. This concept was originally introduced by the German educator Friedrich Fröbel and has since spread worldwide. In Germany, legislation guarantees access to preschool institutions for children starting from the age of one. As a result, more than ninety percent of children aged three to six participate in preschool education programs. The German system emphasizes creativity, independence, and social skills development among young children. In Asia, South Korea is considered one of the most successful countries in developing preschool education [7]. The government has introduced a national curriculum known as the “Nuri Curriculum,” which standardizes educational programs for children aged three to five. The state actively supports preschool education through financial subsidies and policy reforms, and preschool education for five-year-old children is free of charge. These reforms have significantly increased participation rates and improved the quality of early childhood education. Sweden also demonstrates a highly developed preschool education system. In Sweden, preschool institutions are closely connected with the country’s social welfare policies. A large proportion of children aged one to five attend preschool institutions, and the system is designed to support both children’s development and parents’ participation in the labor market. Educational activities emphasize creativity, cooperation, and social communication skills [8].

2. Methodology

This research is based on a qualitative comparative analysis of preschool education systems in selected countries. The study examines international reports, educational policies, and scientific literature related to early childhood education reforms [9].

First, official reports and statistical data from international organizations such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), UNESCO, and the European Commission were analyzed to evaluate global trends in preschool education development [10].

Second, a comparative method was used to examine the preschool education systems of France, Finland, Germany, South Korea, and Sweden. The analysis focused on educational policies, enrollment rates, pedagogical approaches, and government support mechanisms.

Finally, the findings were synthesized to identify common features and successful practices that contribute to the effectiveness of preschool education systems in different countries [11].

Overall, the experience of developed countries demonstrates that the successful development of preschool education systems depends on several key factors. These include strong governmental support, universal access to early childhood education, well-trained educators, and the implementation of innovative pedagogical methods. Investment in preschool education contributes significantly to the development of human capital and promotes sustainable social and economic development. Therefore, strengthening preschool education systems remains one of the most important priorities of modern educational policy worldwide [12]. Finland is widely recognized for its high-quality education system. Preschool education in Finland follows a child-centered approach that focuses on creativity, exploration, and play-based learning. Participation in preschool education for six-year-old children is compulsory, while younger children can attend early childhood education programs voluntarily. The Finnish government introduced reforms to expand access to early childhood education and improve educational quality. In recent years, Finland has implemented pilot programs for two-year preschool education aimed at strengthening children’s readiness for school. Teachers in Finland are required to have university-level qualifications, which ensures high

professional standards in early childhood education. Educational activities in Finnish preschools include outdoor learning, art, music, and group interaction, which help children develop social competence and independence. Germany has a long tradition of preschool education based on the kindergarten model introduced by educator Friedrich Fröbel in the nineteenth century. The kindergarten concept emphasizes play, creativity, and hands-on learning experiences. In 2013, Germany introduced legislation guaranteeing access to preschool institutions for children starting from the age of one. This reform significantly expanded the availability of childcare and early education services. Today, the majority of children aged three to six attend kindergarten programs. The German preschool system focuses on social development, creativity, and cooperation. Children participate in activities such as storytelling, music, outdoor play, and collaborative games that promote emotional and social development. South Korea has made significant progress in developing its preschool education system. The government introduced a national curriculum known as the Nuri Curriculum, which standardizes educational programs for children aged three to five. The Nuri Curriculum focuses on five main developmental areas: physical health, communication, social relationships, artistic expression, and exploration of the environment. The government also provides financial support to families to reduce the cost of preschool education. In addition, preschool teachers in South Korea receive specialized training, and the government regularly evaluates preschool institutions to ensure educational quality [13]. These reforms have significantly increased participation rates in early childhood education. Sweden has one of the most inclusive preschool education systems in the world. Preschool institutions are closely connected to the country's social welfare policies, which support both child development and parental employment. Children aged one to five can attend preschool institutions, and municipalities are responsible for providing preschool places for all families. Educational activities focus on cooperation, creativity, and democratic values. Swedish preschools emphasize child autonomy and social interaction. Children participate in group projects, storytelling activities, art programs, and outdoor exploration. These methods encourage creativity, independence, and teamwork [14].

3. Result

The analysis demonstrates that countries with well-developed preschool education systems share several common characteristics.

First, universal access to preschool education is a key priority in many developed countries. In France, preschool education has been compulsory for children starting from the age of three since 2019. As a result, nearly all children aged three to five attend preschool institutions.

Second, Finland's preschool education system is based on a child-centered pedagogical approach emphasizing creativity, play-based learning, and social development. Teachers are highly qualified and required to hold university-level degrees.

Third, Germany has a long tradition of preschool education through the kindergarten system introduced by Friedrich Fröbel. Legislation guaranteeing access to preschool institutions for children from the age of one has significantly increased enrollment rates.

Fourth, South Korea has implemented a national preschool curriculum known as the Nuri Curriculum, which standardizes early childhood education programs and ensures high educational quality.

Finally, Sweden's preschool education system is closely integrated with the country's social welfare policies, providing accessible childcare and supporting parents' participation in the labor market [15].

4. Discussion

The results indicate that successful preschool education reforms depend on several key factors, including strong governmental support, adequate funding, well-trained educators, and the implementation of child-centered teaching methods.

International experience demonstrates that early childhood education should not only focus on academic preparation but also on the development of social, emotional, and

creative skills. Play-based learning, collaborative activities, and interactive teaching methods help children develop independence and critical thinking abilities.

Furthermore, preschool education contributes to broader social and economic development. Research shows that investment in early childhood education leads to long-term benefits such as improved educational outcomes, higher employment rates, and reduced social inequality [4]–[6].

Therefore, countries seeking to improve their preschool education systems should focus on expanding access, strengthening teacher training programs, and introducing innovative pedagogical approaches.

5. Conclusion

The study demonstrates that preschool education reforms play a crucial role in improving the quality and accessibility of early childhood education systems. Countries such as France, Finland, Germany, South Korea, and Sweden have successfully implemented reforms aimed at expanding preschool coverage, improving teacher training, and introducing child-centered educational approaches.

These reforms highlight the importance of government support, universal access to preschool education, and the adoption of innovative pedagogical practices. Investment in early childhood education contributes significantly to the development of human capital and promotes long-term social and economic progress.

Therefore, strengthening preschool education systems should remain a key priority for policymakers and educators seeking to improve national education systems and support children's holistic development.

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