Conceptual Definition and Analysis of the Quality of Working Environment for Kindergarten Teachers

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Abstract: In recent years, the focus on early childhood education has shifted from merely providing care to emphasizing high-quality nurturing. Consequently, there has been increased societal attention and demand for kindergarten teachers. Within the context of comprehensive enhancements in the quality of early childhood education, a paradox has arisen between the "high expectations" for kindergarten teachers and the prevailing issues of "low compensation" and "limited foundation" in their working environment. As direct participants in educational activities, kindergarten teachers' working environment significantly influences not only the well-being of young children but also the overall quality of early childhood education. While many administrators and governmental bodies recognize the impact of environment on individuals, the current state of the working environment for kindergarten teachers in terms of external support, its scientific assessment, and how its specific components affect teachers' professional well-being necessitates systematic discussion. Therefore, this study aims to examine the concept of the quality of working environment for kindergarten teachers within the context of Chinese culture and to critically analyze relevant concepts. This endeavor seeks to enrich theoretical frameworks and assist practical administrators in better regulating the constituent elements of the working environment to more accurately safeguard the external conditions of kindergarten teaching.

Keywords: kindergarten teachers, working environment quality, quality of work-life

1. Introduction

As early as February 2012, the International Labour Organization (ILO) convened a dialogue forum on the working conditions of kindergarten teachers in Geneva, Switzerland, aiming to enhance preschool enrollment rates and the quality of early childhood education through improving the social status and working environment of kindergarten teachers [1]. In 2014, ILO published a dedicated document, "Policy Guidelines on Promoting Decent Work for Early Childhood Education Personnel [2]," stipulating that educators have the right to expect a work environment that is "safe, healthy, and conducive to professional growth." However, in practical terms, the working environment of kindergarten teachers remains subpar, evidenced by low salary levels, a lack of professional advancement channels, and excessive workloads [3]. The current neglect of the quality of working environment for kindergarten teachers not only affects their job satisfaction [4], professional well-being [5], and mental health [6] but also results in subpar teaching quality,

hastening the attrition of teaching staff and destabilizing the teaching workforce. This situation hinders the attraction of exceptional talents. Therefore, assessing the working environment for kindergarten teachers and enhancing the quality thereof are of paramount importance.

Despite the close relationship between the working environment of kindergarten teachers and the professional practice of early childhood education, existing research on work environment and its quality predominantly centers around topics in corporate management, healthcare, and labor security. In recent years, a limited number of studies have addressed teacher work environments, but these mainly focus on grassroots education, and there is a dearth of research on the work environment of teachers in the field of early childhood education. Against the backdrop of efforts to improve the quality of early childhood education, research on the quality of working environments for kindergarten teachers reveals significant gaps. Notably, while various assessment tools exist for evaluating the quality of children's growth environments such as learning environment quality and living environment quality (e.g., the CLASS Scale, ECERS Scale, and Australia's NQS certification assessment), the study of kindergarten teachers' working environments remains largely unexplored. The OECD highlighted this imbalance when evaluating Australia's early childhood education quality monitoring system, noting that attention has been directed toward staffing arrangements, governance, and leadership capacity, but the NQS in Australia emphasizes these factors only in relation to how they contribute to children's learning and well-being. The many dimensions of the adult work environment have yet to receive the same degree of attention, and research in this area would support employee welfare and enhance job satisfaction.

Despite continuous policy and practical emphasis on valuing the quality of the working environment for kindergarten teachers in recent years, many administrators and researchers lack a clear understanding of the essence of this quality. In actual implementation, there is a tendency to prioritize conceptual awareness without comprehending how to practically ensure teachers' individual well-being. Hence, this study aims to systematically review existing research and practical concepts, consolidate the essence of the quality of the working environment for kindergarten teachers, and critically analyze the related concepts of the quality of working life for kindergarten teachers. This endeavor aims to enrich relevant theories and aid practical administrators in better regulating the constituent elements of working environment quality to more accurately safeguard the external conditions of kindergarten teacher work, thereby ensuring high-quality teaching outcomes.

2. Research Methodology

2.1. Literature Review

The study of the working environment has consistently drawn attention from scholars across various fields. However, due to differing perspectives from different domains, the definition of the working environment varies as well. Through searches on platforms such as WOS, the author found relevant foreign studies. The earliest definition of the concept of the working environment was put forth by scholars Seashore and Taber, who, in their 1975 study, defined the working environment as the compensation, benefits, challenges, autonomy, opportunities for acquiring new knowledge, and development that workers receive in the workplace. This environment is accompanied by certain interpersonal relationships and psychological sensations, such as satisfaction, achievement, honor, and self-fulfillment [7]. OECD documents have also noted that the working environment generally encompasses specific work tasks, relatively fixed schedules and management, physical and sociocultural surroundings, employee subjective satisfaction, and advancement opportunities [8].

Among studies by Chinese scholars, the earliest scholar, Fan Yangsong, indicated in his research that the working environment consists of two aspects: external and internal. The external aspect

pertains to the objective geographic environment, primarily including workspace, office equipment, and facilities. The internal aspect encompasses the organizational atmosphere, primarily involving employee relationships and work enthusiasm [9]. Subsequently, in 2007, Hao Yingchao combined China's cultural background and characteristics to define the working environment as a collective social atmosphere that maximizes the flow of information and knowledge sharing within the organization [10]. Scholar Shen Yourun's research focused more on interactions between individuals and organizations, interpreting the working environment as composed of elements such as work, managers, workgroups, and organizational elements. If an individual aligns with this environment, positive impacts are generated for both employees and organizations [11]. In her study, Wu Huiying divided the working environment into physical and psychological aspects. The physical aspect encompasses objective workspace, visible materials, equipment, decorations, etc. The psychological aspect emphasizes interpersonal relationships, work development training, compensation, and hidden internal factors. Scholar Zhu Tianyi directly classified the working environment into two dimensions. First, the subjective working environment involves activities directly related to work, including management support and relevant regulations. Second, the objective working environment includes employee compensation, training, and development [12]. In her research, scholar Li Ting similarly divided the working environment into two parts: the physical environment, which includes physical resources and facilities, and the human environment [13]. In a study concerning the working environment of teachers, Wan Jinwen indicated that a teacher's working environment includes eight aspects: the educational environment, employment conditions (benefits, etc.), campus environment (objective environment), human environment, interpersonal relationships, public opinion environment, research environment, and teaching environment [14].

Regarding the definition of the working environment for kindergarten teachers, Cai Yingqi, Feng Hui, and others defined it as the physical and social environment related to teaching work. The specific elements include management systems, mental atmosphere, learning resources, and resource conditions. Management systems are regulations or rules established by kindergartens to unify and standardize educational practices. The mental atmosphere refers to spiritual experiences derived from leaders, parents, education authorities, etc. Resource conditions involve facilities like libraries, dedicated classrooms, and special books provided to teachers [15]. However, their research did not include kindergarten backgrounds and teacher welfare. In her study, Yao Fangyu divided the kindergarten teacher's working environment into a physical environment with financial resources, equipment, and relevant information, and a psychological environment involving social support, work pressure, and teamwork [16]. In her survey, Ge Yanxia categorized the kindergarten working environment into three dimensions: objective kindergarten infrastructure, subjective kindergarten interpersonal relationships, and the kindergarten promotion system and development environment [17].

Considering the unique nature of the kindergarten working environment, Corr proposed that the early childhood working environment is distinct as it is primarily designed for children. Therefore, special considerations are necessary to ensure that kindergarten teachers can thrive in this environment. Internationally, the International Labour Organization's (ILO) Policy Guidelines on the Promotion of Decent Work for Early Childhood Education Personnel stipulate that education workers have the right to expect a working environment that is "safe, healthy, and conducive to professional growth [18]."

2.2. Conceptual Delimitations

2.2.1. Kindergarten Teacher Work Environment

In previous research, there has been no unified definition for the concept of work environment. In the studies conducted by most scholars, the definition of work environment has been approached from both broad and narrow perspectives. Broadly speaking, the work environment refers to the comprehensive combination of physical and social aspects related to work. This can be categorized for analysis into three main levels: individual, interpersonal, and organizational. In the context of research related to the work environment of kindergarten teachers, Cai Yingqi, Feng Hui, and others in the journal "Preschool Education Research" defined the kindergarten work environment as the physical and social environment related to teachers' work. Specific elements are delineated as management systems, psychological environment, learning resources, and resource conditions. The OECD in its "Report" highlights that the construction of a high-quality early childhood education teacher workforce should address three aspects: "teacher professional development," "teacher working conditions," and "leadership management," emphasizing the supportive role of the teacher work environment in their documentation.

Therefore, this study defines the kindergarten teacher work environment as the subjective and objective work environments that directly or indirectly influence teachers' work cognition, behavior, and emotions within the work environment. While categorizing subjective and objective work environments based on the suggestions presented in the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation OECD's "Guidelines on Measuring the Quality of the Working Environment," it is explained that "objective concepts are those that can be observed and evaluated independently of individuals' personal experiences and assessments; in principle, they are observable by others." Thus, in defining the concepts for this study, the objective work environment encompasses experiences and observations that can be independently evaluated by third parties, while the subjective work environment relies on individual self-reports and cannot be objectively evaluated by third parties.

2.2.2. Kindergarten Teacher Work Environment Quality

Drawing from relevant concepts integrated through the research of other scholars, the present study defines the quality of the kindergarten teacher work environment as the degree of appropriateness of the subjective and objective elements within the work environment that directly or indirectly influence teachers' work cognition, behavior, and emotions.

3. Analysis of Work Environment Quality and Work-Life Quality

3.1. Comparison of the Connotations of Teacher Work Environment Quality and Work-Life Quality

3.1.1. Connotations of Teacher Work Environment Quality

Regarding the measurement of the work environment, the earliest traces can be found in the 1960s with researchers such as Hall and Croft, Likert, Litwin and Sringer, Campbell, and Walker. They measured aspects such as superior-subordinate relationships, organizational goals, job structure, organizational structure, colleague relationships, autonomy, managerial support, internal conflicts, performance standards, and communication frequency. Notably, Litwin and Stringer's Organizational Climate Scale had a significant influence. Measurement of the work environment initially emerged in the field of business management in Western countries, primarily aiming to safeguard employee rights and enhance their work enthusiasm. Scholars began applying these

concepts to the field of education in the 1980s, although research remained relatively limited.

To uncover the connotations of teacher work environment quality, it is crucial to accurately comprehend and grasp the fundamental meaning of "environmental quality." Environmental quality generally refers to the suitability of the overall environment or certain elements within a specific scope for human survival, life, and development. As a subconcept of environmental quality, teacher work environment quality pertains to the suitability of elements within a teacher's work environment for their survival, life, and development. Applied to the context of kindergarten teachers, kindergarten teacher work environment quality specifically relates to the suitability of elements within the kindergarten setting for their survival, life, and development.

3.1.2. Connotations of Teacher Work-Life Quality

Research on work-life quality originated in the 1970s. With the rise of the work-life quality movement, emphasis on meeting employee needs gradually became a significant topic in various organizational human resource management contexts. Presently, due to its multidimensional and multifaceted nature, there is no universally accepted definition of life quality. However, based on the understanding of life quality, Chinese scholars have categorized teacher work-life quality into broad and narrow interpretations. According to scholar Luo Rugu's research, broadly speaking, teacher work-life quality involves the degree to which society and schools provide suitable work-life conditions for teachers and fulfill teachers' work-life needs. In a narrower sense, teacher work-life quality refers to teachers' subjective perceptions and evaluations of various dimensions of work-life, such as overall work-life conditions, job characteristics, work environment, compensation and benefits, organizational management, career advancement, and professional development, based on a certain material foundation.

3.1.3. Key Differences in the Connotations of Work Environment Quality and Work-Life Quality

In terms of research scope, teacher work environment quality primarily examines the suitability of elements within the work environment for individual teachers. In contrast, teacher work-life quality encompasses a broader spectrum. Broad teacher work-life quality includes both the social environment in which teachers operate and the extent to which society and schools provide suitable work-life conditions (supply side) as well as the degree to which teachers' individual work-life needs are met (demand side). Narrow research on work-life quality explores teachers' subjective perceptions of various aspects of their work-life, focusing more on their satisfaction with work-life conditions within the existing supply context.

3.2. Structural Differences Between Teacher Work Environment Quality and Work-Life Quality

The structure of teacher work-life quality encompasses dimensions related to work, organization, and society. It specifically addresses various aspects of teachers' teaching and personal lives, including work environment, compensation and benefits, physical and mental well-being, career advancement and development, interpersonal relationships, organizational management, and social security. Depending on the emphasis of different scholars' research, there may be slight variations in the specific dimensions.

On the other hand, due to limitations posed by the research subject, the structure of work environment quality is often divided into subjective work environment and objective work environment. Its dimensions encompass work space, management systems, institutional culture, professional development, social support, and more. However, as a comparative development, the

structural dimensions of teacher work-life quality are broader, whereas work environment quality is more focused on the structural elements within a specific organization or setting.

3.3. Different Emphases in the Measurement Indicators of Teacher Work Environment Quality and Work-Life Quality

Due to their distinct structural divisions, the measurement indicators in their evaluation processes also exhibit varying emphases. Teacher work-life quality primarily relies on the degree of satisfaction of teachers' work-life needs as its basis of measurement. On the other hand, work environment quality primarily emphasizes the extent of provisions offered by the supply side (institutions, schools, society, etc.), resulting in different indicators from those used in measuring work environment quality. For instance, based on the Life Satisfaction Scale, Hart (P.M. Hart) compiled measurement indicators for teacher work-life quality, including the degree to which work-life approaches expected goals, work conditions, job satisfaction, sense of value in work-life, and intention to switch positions.

3.4. Differences in Assessment Tools for Teacher Work Environment Quality and Work-Life Quality

3.4.1. Theoretical Foundation Differences

Teacher work-life quality involves teachers' subjective perceptions and evaluations of the overall state and dimensions of their work and personal lives within a certain material context. The evaluation indicators for teacher work-life quality mainly encompass subjective and objective indicators. Objective indicators reflect the extent to which society and schools provide suitable work-life conditions for teachers and include metrics such as work intensity, teaching facilities and equipment, total leisure time for teachers, teacher salary levels, per capita training funds for teachers, and more. Subjective indicators reflect the degree to which teachers' work-life needs are met, including indicators like physical and mental well-being, work conditions, compensation and benefits, interpersonal relationships, career advancement, social security, etc. Given the multidimensional and multifaceted nature of teachers' work-life environments, current evaluation tools are based on various theoretical foundations and are often self-developed or modified questionnaires, aligned with scholars' research perspectives. Notable theoretical bases include the "person-job-organization" theory, Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory, and the "motivation-hygiene" theory.

Evaluation of kindergarten teacher work environment can be traced back to 1988 when American scholar Paula Jorde-Bloom conducted research using a self-compiled assessment scale based on organizational climate theory, surveying 629 preschool teachers from 65 non-profit and for-profit centers. In China, in 2015, Professor Yau-ho P. Wong from Hong Kong developed a questionnaire to measure the work environment conditions of kindergarten teachers in the Hong Kong region. These assessments are based on the organizational climate theory. Additionally, there are studies on kindergarten teacher work environments that integrate other aspects, such as self-directed learning and perception of the work environment, and utilize different theoretical frameworks.

3.4.2. Dimension and Indicator Differences

Despite the inclusion of the work environment dimension in existing kindergarten teacher work-life quality assessments, the focus tends to be on broader issues like enrollment and developmental prospects for the institution as a whole. A comparison of the specific indicators used in the kindergarten teacher work-life quality questionnaire by Fan Mingli and Liu Jia [19] with the

kindergarten teacher work environment questionnaire used by Cai Yingqi [20] reveals the following results:

Table 1: Comparison between kindergarten teacher work environment questionnaire and kindergarten teacher work-life quality questionnaire.

Kindergarten Teacher Work Environment Questionnaire Dimensions	Resource Conditions	Learning Opportunities	Psychological Environment	Management Systems		(None)
Kindergarten Teacher Work-Life Quality Questionnaire Dimensions	Environmental Conditions	Teaching Characteristics	Colleague Relationships	Leadership Management	Welfare Benefits	Leisure Activities
	Taking the "Environmental Conditions" dimension as an example, its specific indicators are: 1. The kindergarten has a good student intake. 2. The kindergarten has promising prospects for development. 3. The kindergarten enjoys a good reputation in the local community. 4. The kindergarten has a rich variety of activity resources. 5. The educational quality of the kindergarten is poor.					
Summary: Except for the common indicator of rich activity resources under the "Environmental Conditions" dimension of work-life quality, all other specific indicators have differing emphases compared to the kindergarten teacher work environment questionnaire dimensions.						

3.5. The Relationship Between Teacher Work Environment Quality and Work-Life Quality

3.5.1. Broad Teacher Work-Life Quality Includes Teacher Work Environment Quality

Broad teacher work-life quality encompasses work environment quality, while narrow teacher work-life quality places greater emphasis on subjective perceptions and evaluations within existing conditions. Teacher work environment quality, on the other hand, focuses more on whether the elements of various work environments are sufficiently suitable. In practical research, the exploration of teacher work-life quality often centers on the narrow perspective. However, based on the summary and analysis by Luo Rugu, the connotation of teacher work-life quality is broader, including the provision of relevant elements from the societal and school supply side.

3.5.2. Improvement in Both Aspects Benefits Educational Quality and Educators' Well-being

Whether it is teacher work-life quality or teacher work environment quality, both address the level of support provided to teachers by the organizational environment they belong to. By focusing on ecological elements relevant to teachers' environments, improving the quality of these elements enhances educators' job satisfaction and competence, allowing them to better fulfill their proactive roles in the educational process and consequently enhance overall educational quality.

3.5.3. Direct Impact of Teacher Work Environment Quality on Work-Life Quality

Teacher work environment quality and teacher work-life quality both fall under the realm of quality and mutually influence each other. In a certain sense, work environment quality provides external conditions for teachers' work and lives. This involves factors such as management systems,

institutional culture, and social support, which directly impact the quality of teachers' work and lives. Conversely, if teacher work-life quality is high, it can indicate that the work environment quality in the institution is also high to some extent. However, the focus of the two aspects is still different.

In the studies conducted by various scholars, both the specific dimensions and indicators of teacher work environment quality and work-life quality have distinct emphases. Conducting related research and mutually learning from each other hold significant importance.

4. Research Conclusions

Through the collection and analysis of relevant literature and the delineation of relevant concepts, this study has summarized the elements within the context of Chinese cultural background that constitute kindergarten teacher work environment quality. These elements include work space, management systems, institutional culture, social support, and professional development.

4.1. Work Space Within the Connotation of Kindergarten Teacher Work Environment Quality

Differing from teachers at other educational levels, kindergarten teachers work within a unique environment due to the distinctiveness of their working space. Corr highlighted that early childhood work environments are unique because they are primarily designed for children. Therefore, special considerations are needed to ensure that kindergarten teachers can also thrive within this environment. Internationally, the International Labour Organization's Policy Guidelines on the Promotion of Decent Work for Early Childhood Education Personnel stipulate that educational workers have the right to expect a work environment that is "safe, healthy, and conducive to professional growth." [21] Both "safety" and "health" encompass physiological and psychological aspects. Physical safety and health mainly depend on the tangible spatial scope in which kindergarten teachers operate on a daily basis. In 2015, Dr. Yau-ho P. Wong from Hong Kong, while developing a self-compiled evaluation scale for kindergarten teacher work environment, categorized dimensions under "ergonomics." This dimension primarily includes issues such as indoor and outdoor air quality in kindergartens, lighting, safety of teaching aids, and personnel security. In the research process of this paper, building upon the categorization by Dr. Yau-ho P. Wong, an additional dimension of "professional development" was incorporated under the work space category. This dimension is believed to encompass a collection of tangible elements that ensure the "safety and health" of kindergarten teachers while promoting their "professional development." This dimension mainly includes three sub-dimensions: "equipment and facilities," "safety and health," and "personnel allocation." Specifically, "equipment and facilities" focuses on the teaching requirements, activity space, and privacy within the kindergarten; "safety and health" primarily concerns the safety of indoor spaces within the kindergarten and the provision of necessities such as food, accommodation, and transportation; "personnel allocation" addresses the adequacy of the number of teachers within the kindergarten to support various teaching, substitution, and internal activities carried out by the teachers.

4.2. Management Systems Within the Connotation of Kindergarten Teacher Work Environment Quality

Kindergarten teachers, as the key drivers of promoting the quality development of preschool education, are not mere tools for fulfilling preschool education tasks. Therefore, the appropriateness of management systems within the kindergarten teacher work environment significantly impacts factors such as teachers' enthusiasm and sense of well-being, sense of belonging and collective

honor, and ownership consciousness. If management systems are overly rigid and dogmatic, they can potentially dampen teachers' enthusiasm and initiative for learning, research, and teaching enhancement. Management systems are tools of certain organizations, institutions, or units, comprising standardized measures for specific management mechanisms, principles, methods, and organizational structures. They serve as the foundation for implementing management actions and ensuring the smooth progress of societal production processes. Zhang Xiaofeng indicated that if managers can apply relevant theories scientifically, implement professional management, respect teachers' individualized development, and fully tap into teachers' untapped potential, the occupational happiness index of kindergarten teachers, as well as their positive work state, will undergo positive transformations. This, in turn, will lead to the healthy operation of kindergartens and an overall improvement in kindergarten education quality [22].

In this study, by combining prior research and utilizing external benchmarks from organizational atmospheres, the indicators within the realm of management systems were divided into "decision-making system," "welfare and compensation," "evaluation system," and "workflow." Among these, the "decision-making system" refers to the extent of teachers' participation in various affairs within the kindergarten and the principal's acceptance of teachers' democratic feedback. "Welfare and compensation" aims to understand whether the current distribution of compensation within the kindergarten work environment is relatively fair and reasonable, and whether there is a clear and open promotion mechanism to motivate teachers' enthusiasm. In 1993, China promulgated the "Law of the People's Republic of China on Teachers," and in 2006, the revised "Compulsory Education Law of the People's Republic of China" clearly defined the social status and economic treatment of teachers. Especially in compulsory education schools, salaries were fully covered by financial security and were stipulated not to be lower than the average salary of local civil servants. However, as a weak link in basic education, preschool education only received explicit attention in recent years. In the Ministry of Education's 2022 work priorities released on February 9, 2022, it was stated that kindergarten teacher salaries should not be lower than the average income of local civil servants, gradually raising kindergarten teachers' income. Therefore, in the process of formulating the "Kindergarten Teacher Work Environment Quality Questionnaire," "welfare and compensation" were also included as crucial indicators. "Evaluation system" encompasses the timeliness, rationality, and direction of teacher evaluations within the kindergarten, as well as the kindergarten's own assessment system's capacity for self-improvement, updates, and continuous self-adjustment to ensure the smooth operation of various aspects of the kindergarten. "Workflow" includes the clarity of the division of labor among teachers, caregivers, and other personnel within the kindergarten, as well as the clarity of the teacher work arrangement process.

4.3. Kindergarten Organizational Culture Within the Connotation of Kindergarten Teacher Work Environment Quality

Owens posits that a school is a cultural entity. Through long-term division of labor, collaboration, interconnection, and interaction, schools develop a set of values, belief systems, principles, and thought processes that represent the characteristics of their organizational members [23]. In the context of early childhood education research, scholars such as Wu Hailong et al. have summarized kindergarten organizational culture as a value system and code of behavior that has been accumulated and passed down through long-term educational practices. This system is recognized and followed by all members of the kindergarten [24]. While scholars emphasize different aspects of the concept and connotation of the organizational culture within the kindergarten where teachers work, and individual kindergartens exhibit personalized differences in their organizational cultures, they all include value systems. By combining survey indicators with policy and literature sources, this study categorizes fundamental "teacher perspectives" and "child perspectives" under the

dimension of organizational culture.

4.4. Social Support Within the Connotation of Kindergarten Teacher Work Environment Quality

Social support refers to the system of support generated through the interaction between individuals and the external environment [25]. Since 2010, China has placed increasing emphasis on early childhood education. The 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China highlighted the priority of educational development and proposed the realization of "ensuring that every child has access to early childhood education." Scholars like Hou Limin and others have frequently advocated for the high-quality development of early childhood education towards "ensuring that every child has access to high-quality early childhood education" on the official website of the Ministry of Education in 2022. Amid the backdrop of continuous national support for the high-quality development of early childhood education, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council issued the "Opinions on Deepening the Reform of Teacher Team Building in the New Era," which urgently called for the construction of a high-quality kindergarten teacher team. In the daily work environment of kindergarten teachers, social support is an important factor that potentially influences their work enthusiasm and sense of well-being. Within this dimension, based on the different sources of social support and the characteristics of kindergarten teachers' work, it is divided into four parts: teacher-child relationships, colleague relationships, home-school relationships, and policy support. Teacher-child relationships refer to the interactive relationship system formed between kindergarten teachers and children through communication and mutual influence during the educational process. Colleague relationships refer to the bilateral interactive relationships formed between kindergarten teachers and other educators, caregivers, etc., due to work-related activities and mutual influence. Home-school relationships refer to the bilateral interactive relationships formed between kindergarten teachers and caregivers of children through interaction and mutual influence. Policy support refers to the practical or potential benefits brought to the professional group of kindergarten teachers in their daily life and work by relevant laws, information, and advocacy ideas and concepts issued at the national level.

4.5. Professional Development Within the Connotation of Kindergarten Teacher Work Environment Quality

To promote the high-quality development of early childhood education, efforts should be focused on building a professional teacher workforce. The "14th Five-Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development and the 2035 Vision Goal Outline of the People's Republic of China" clearly outlines the major planning goal of "building a high-quality education system," within which the "construction of a high-quality, professional teacher workforce" also presents new requirements for teachers' professional development. In 2021, the Ministry of Education and nine other departments initiated the "Action Plan for Promoting the High-Quality Development of Early Childhood Education in the 14th Five-Year Plan," explicitly stating the need to "improve the quality of kindergarten teacher training" and create a high-quality, professional kindergarten teacher workforce. In 2022, the Ministry of Education and eight other departments issued the "New Era Basic Education Strong Teacher Plan," proposing to "promote the revitalization and development of teacher education, and strive to cultivate a high-quality, professional, innovative teaching workforce for primary and secondary schools (including kindergartens and special education) in the new era." Within the kindergarten teacher's institutional context, which is their work environment, the maximization of teacher's professional development is also paramount. Professional development refers to the continuous improvement and enhancement of teachers as professionals in terms of

professional ideas, knowledge, and abilities, transitioning from novice to expert teachers. In this study, it mainly encompasses three dimensions: professional enhancement, professional support, and professional planning. Professional enhancement refers to the advancement of kindergarten teachers in terms of their professional ideas, knowledge, and abilities. Professional support indicates the external support that kindergarten teachers receive in their professional development. Professional planning refers to the plans made by kindergarten teachers based on their individual characteristics for enhancement within their professional domain.

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