

A Preliminary Qualitative Exploration of the Career Shift of Educational Childcare Service Workers to the Service Industry: From the Perspective of Emotional

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ABSTRACT

In 2011, following the integration of early childhood education and care, education personnel officially became known as "educational care service personnel." However, the use of the term "service" has negatively impacted the practical aspects of early childhood education. When the education sector is labeled as a "service," many parents begin to view early childhood education as a type of "service product," leading to numerous unreasonable demands on early childhood educators and undermining their labor dignity. As a result, early childhood education in our country has transformed into a "service industry."

Nevertheless, the presence of emotional labor within the early childhood education sector warrants in-depth investigation. This study, using Taiwan as a case example, aims to explore the reasons behind the transformation of the early childhood education industry into a service industry, focusing on an emotional labor causal model. The research employs "literature analysis" and "semi-structured interviews" to discuss the reasons and processes behind the transformation of the educational care service industry, the influencing factors, and the impact of emotional labor on educational care service personnel. Finally, this study provides concrete suggestions for future early childhood education practitioners.

KEYWORDS: Preschool educator, emotional labor, integration of preschool and kindergarten, service industry, preschool education.

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Integration of preschool and kindergarten

Preschool integration has been a significant reform in the preschool education sector in our country. According to current regulations, kindergartens are institutions implementing "preschool education," placing them within the education industry, catering to children aged four to the pre-primary school age. On the other hand, childcare centers provide "childcare services" as welfare institutions, encompassing both "infant care" and "child care." In practical operation, there is a high degree of overlap and similarity between the two. In terms of administrative oversight, kindergartens and childcare centers fall under the influences of the "education" and "social welfare" administrative departments, respectively. Kindergartens adhere to regulations related to preschool education, while childcare centers follow regulations related to child welfare. Both institutions employ preschool educators and care staff, each responsible for preschool education and care based on their respective qualifications and responsibilities.

With the evolution of time, the trend has shifted towards kindergartens incorporating elements of childcare centers and vice versa. This has resulted in a scenario where children of the same age, in two different institutions, receive varying qualities of education and care. Recognizing these challenges, the need for planning and consensus on the position and direction of "preschool integration" in the current era is evident. This includes considerations for "integration positioning" and "integration goals" as two key indicators. Following such integration, kindergartens and childcare centers coexist to establish a public preschool education system alongside private institution. This system aims to meet diverse needs, significantly improve the friendliness towards vulnerable families and their children, enhance the protection of professional rights, and assist private childcare institutions in adapting to societal trends. This is especially crucial in an era of weakened family functions and global economic disparities, serving as a benevolent measure to address society's needs, prevent social issues, and maintain universally high-quality childcare.

Returning to the perspective of preschool educators, apart from public kindergartens, most institutions are effectively private. For those preschool educators, salaries and welfare benefits often cannot match those offered by public kindergartens. However, the primary goal of advocating for the public nature of preschool education is to leverage government resources to provide excellent preschool education quality, ensuring better protection for preschool educators and fostering a friendly work environment.

B. Education Industry Transitioning Toward Service-Oriented Challenges and Concerns

Facing the impact of declining birth rates, many universities in our country are undergoing transformations or facing the challenge of downsizing in higher education. Government policies encourage schools to collaborate more closely with industries to adapt to the changing landscape. However, a prevailing belief among scholars and the general public is that higher education should not solely serve the needs of industries. Simultaneously, educators at various levels share a common sentiment and unanimously agree that education should not be reduced to a service industry. A news headline from March 2021 reads: "Teachers being criticized by parents as service providers: Lack of respect for professionalism," prompting reflection on how conflicts between parents and teachers can be addressed and resolved.

The relationship between parents and teachers is unique, born out of a common concern for the child. Cooperation is essential, particularly as a child's early experiences in school are filled with challenges in learning, interpersonal relationships, and psychological aspects. Thus, collaborative efforts between parents and teachers are necessary to support a child's willingness to grow through challenges. Mutual trust and cooperation are crucial, as suspicion and criticism from either side can make things difficult for the child. When parents and preschool educators hold different educational perspectives, effective communication becomes paramount. While there may be common principles in family and school education, there are also differing points. For example, parents may prioritize "letting the child develop adaptively, be themselves, not conform to others, and emphasize happiness over academics." While this approach emphasizes respecting the child and adaptive development, teachers may focus on helping children adapt to group norms, building interpersonal relationships, developing self-responsibility, and fostering a sense of achievement and confidence in overcoming learning tasks with peers.

The nature of work for preschool educators, compared to educators in other stages of education, tends to lean towards emotional labor. Advocates propose that educational institutions should be closely aligned with the realities of preschool education, considering the emotional labor of educators. In the rapidly changing social landscape, preschool education institutions need to enhance financial capabilities, set clear business goals, and focus on improving competitiveness. Therefore, proper business strategies are crucial for development and survival (Chung Rong-Chong, 2003).

Yang Mengjuan (2004) contends that kindergartens are no longer just educational institutions but have been defined as "service industries." Sustainable operation becomes a pressing issue in the face of industry competition, making profitability and survival crucial topics. In light of these considerations, this research aims to:

- (A) Explore whether job characteristics, self-identity, and stress impact the emotional labor of preschool educators.
- (B) Understand the multifaceted reasons leading preschool educators to transition from education to a service-oriented industry.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. The impact of integration of preschool and kindergarten.

In January 2012, the "Preschool Education and Care Act" was enacted, marking a significant milestone in the implementation of the preschool integration policy. Frontline workers in kindergartens under this policy include teachers, educare workers, and assistant educare workers, collectively referred to in this article as "preschool educators." Examining the relationship between education and care, Katz & Goffin (1990) argue that the "education and care" of young children should be complementary and inseparable. Caldwell (1989) integrates education and care into "educare," emphasizing the implementation of the concept of integrated education and care, ensuring consistent quality across all childcare institutions. The increasing dependence on out-of-home childcare services, which combine educational and caregiving functions, is evident in the evolving society's structure, the increase in dual-income families, and the elevated awareness of preschool education (Li, Luo-Sun, 2005; Lin Wei-Ru, 2003). Recognizing the growing demand for both childcare and education in society, education authorities, early childhood education practitioners, and policymakers have been deliberating for years. The goal is to comprehensively enhance the quality of early childhood education and care services through "preschool integration" (Chen Shu-Qin, 2012).

With the implementation of the new preschool system in that year, the emphasis was not only on seamlessly aligning and safeguarding the rights and interests of preschool children but also on expecting patience, attention to detail, and effective communication from the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of the Interior, and local governments. The goals set by the Preschool Integration Promotion Committee include: (A) providing equal and quality preschool services for urban and rural children, (B) meeting the preschool needs of modern families, (C) ensuring the rights of registered kindergartens, childcare centers, and qualified educare personnel, and (D) strengthening the development of preschool childcare institutions.

Amidst environmental changes, many kindergartens now not only focus on overall school performance improvement but also emphasize a service-oriented approach for educare service personnel. In Taiwan and globally, the crisis of declining birth rates has led to a shift in education reform towards "marketization" and "competition." Facing the reality of oversupply, the focus should be on improving quality, presenting an opportunity for the sustainable development of education in the country (Wu Kun-Yong, 2007).

More than a decade has passed since the implementation of preschool integration. To discuss the latest planning measures and related policies for kindergartens, this article refers to the 2018 Ministry of Education workshop handbook. The handbook proposes six principles for promoting the systematic operation of kindergartens:

- (A) Goal Orientation: Clear and specific goals.
- (B) Quality Assurance: Execution based on professional principles with a checking mechanism.
- (C) Pursuit of Excellence: Continuous improvement.
- (D) Evidence-Based Approach: Concrete record data and quantitative indicators for improvement.
- (E) Effective Leadership: Leading all members according to the vision, fostering consensus, and motivating proactive pursuit of common goals.
- (F) Full Participation: All members actively contribute according to their expertise.

B. The Relevance of Emotional Labor in Early Childhood Education

This study aims to explore the relationship between early childhood education and emotional labor. Through a review of literature and related materials, several studies were found addressing the impact of teacher emotions on teaching, as well as the emotional practices involved in the teaching process. Miller (2017), using Greece as a case study, conducted a qualitative analysis on the impact of emotional labor on early childhood educators, while also incorporating regression analysis in the full text. The study highlights that teachers undertake a significant amount of emotional labor during the teaching process, which has profound implications for their job satisfaction and mental health. The results from the regression analysis reveal that both teachers and students perceive teachers' views on Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) as playing a crucial role in fostering positive teacher-student relationships. However, the findings also indicate a lack of alignment between teachers' and students' perspectives regarding the nature of these relationships. The discussion delves into the broader implications of these results for future research and practical applications, shedding light on the complex interplay between emotional labor and educational practice. Based on the previous literature and research, it is evident that emotional labor in early childhood education is closely related to students' learning and development. Positive teacher-student relationships can enhance students' motivation and academic outcomes, as students who feel emotionally safe and supported are more likely to engage in the learning

process. Additionally, through emotional labor, teachers can help students develop emotional intelligence, strengthen their social skills, and improve their ability to manage emotions, all of which are crucial for their overall growth. Furthermore, emotional labor allows teachers to more effectively address the challenges in teaching, providing students with appropriate support and guidance, thereby creating a positive learning environment.

Hargreaves (1998) indicated that a teacher's emotional state and teaching effectiveness are mutually influential, with a close connection between emotions and teaching practices. Sutton and Wheatley (2003) conducted research on teacher emotions and emotional aspects of teaching, discovering that a teacher's emotional state not only affects their teaching style but also influences students' learning motivation and emotional development. Isenbarger and Zembylas (2006) argued that caring for students constitutes a form of emotional labor and that a teacher's emotional labor is closely tied to their professional stance in playing a caring role in teaching and learning. Their research further noted that the performance of emotional labor by teachers affects their job satisfaction and self-esteem. From the preceding literature, it is evident that emotional labor is a significant aspect of the teaching environment. Not only are its outcomes worthy of discussion, but the factors contributing to it are also important areas for exploration. Many studies focus on the consequences of emotional labor in teaching, which remains a key topic in research on teaching and teacher education.

C. The Inseparability of Emotional Labor and Education

The term "emotional labor" refers to the process of engaging in labor where there is a high level of interaction with the service recipient. Based on the interests of the organization, service recipient, and oneself, individuals engaged in emotional labor need to manage and control their emotions to present appropriate emotional expressions (Lin Shang-Ping, 2000). Cheng Hong-Ling & Chen Wei-Zheng (2009) categorized the perspectives on defining and measuring emotional labor from previous studies into three dimensions: "behavior of emotional expression," "management of emotional feelings" (i.e., emotional regulation), and "job requirements for emotional expression."

Research on emotional labor originated with Hochschild's (1983) qualitative description and observation of the nature of emotional labor performed by service workers and debt collectors during their work. Taking Western or most restaurants as an example, smiling is one of the job requirements imposed by the organization. Airlines, for instance, have turned the originally inherent "smile" emotional response of flight attendants into a "necessary output" in their work. This is distinct from previous non-physical labor (such as serving and clearing tables). Hochschild termed this type of work in 1983 as "emotional labor." However, the footprint of emotional labor extends across various industries. Simultaneously, emotional labor is generated in both managerial and labor positions. The target of emotional expression has expanded from external service recipients to internal colleagues, supervisors, or subordinates. This article explores the generation of emotional labor among preschool educators, specifically focusing on the "service recipients," namely, the parents of the children. When exploring emotional labor among early childhood education teachers, given the unique nature of serving student subjects in the field of education, especially preschool children, whose emotional dependence tends to increase with younger age, and the need for emotional, physiological care, and support for learning, societal role expectations for preschool educators lean towards warm and positive traits. However, maintaining stable emotional quality for an extended period in demanding and labor-intensive work is not straightforward. When the transformation of emotional management becomes a tool-oriented purpose of emotional control, it can have adverse effects on individuals (Peng Jia-Xuan, 2017), preschool educators are pivotal figures and key influencers in early childhood education. The educators' "words and deeds," "presentation of emotions," "expression of emotions," and the contextual relevance to teaching are closely intertwined with the lives and developmental journeys of young children (Liang Jia-Zhen, 2018). The Marxist-oriented exploration of the labor process, while shifting its focus from promoting labor-capital harmony to the conflicts within the social relations of production, appears to have relatively little discussion on the bodily implications for workers during the labor process (Zhang Jin-Fen, 2013). In the discourse on traditional labor processes and control, the emphasis is primarily on the "de-skilling" and "de-knowledgeization" of production. However, this discussion often overlooks the exploitation of the worker's body. As workers sell their efforts, they are not only selling their time to maximize the employer's utilization of labor but also selling their own bodies. (Leslie, 2010).

However research findings indicate that preschool educators' work involves emotional labor, which is often referred to as emotional labor burden (Zhang Nai-Wen, 2005; Roulston, 2004). This emotional labor burden is subtle, not obvious, and challenging to observe. In the teaching process, not only have to manage their own emotions but also teach children how to regulate their emotions to create a harmonious and intimate classroom

atmosphere. Therefore, emotional issues can impact teaching and learning. Looking at the education system in our country, it has traditionally emphasized "immediate learning outcomes," often overlooking aspects such as "character education" and "moral perspectives" as learning outcomes (Zhang Nai-Wen, 2007 ; Jian Hong-Zhu & Cai Zong-He, 2006). The expression of emotions has also been a long-overlooked issue. However, scholars abroad have proposed that teachers' emotions can impact students' academic achievements (Elias, 2006; Weare, 2004). Therefore, to enhance students' academic achievements and grades, it is natural to start with "teacher's emotional management." Reassessing the cultivation of teachers' emotional literacy is crucial, and it has an absolute connection with education. Refer to Grandey (2000) The discussion on the antecedents of emotional labor points to both "organizational demands for emotional rules and expectations" and "unexpected emotional events in the workplace." As for the consequences of emotional labor on individuals, it may lead to issues such as work fatigue, low job satisfaction, and work-family conflicts due to stress. For organizations, the positive image reflected in employee's good job performance can contribute to positive customer service outcomes. (Grandey, 2000). The following figure illustrates the Emotional Labor Theoretical Model proposed by Grandey in the year 2000.

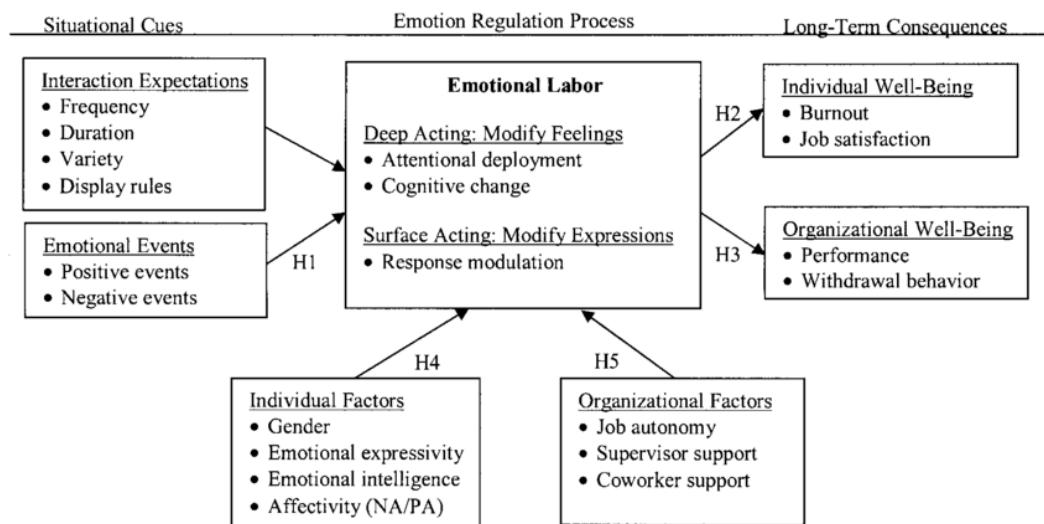


Figure 1. Emotional Labor Theoretical Model. Resource : Grandey (2000)

When discussing the "education industry" and "emotional labor," a close relationship can be observed between the two. This connection primarily stems from the emotional and interpersonal aspects involved in the educational process, including emotional experiences and interactions. The emotional state and emotional labor of educators can have profound effects on students' learning and development. The following points highlight the association between the education industry and emotional labor:

- (A) The impact of children's emotions on learning: A student's emotional state directly influences their ability to learn and participate in school activities. Early childhood educators need to constantly attend to students' emotional needs and provide support to foster a positive learning environment. Therefore, the emotional intelligence and emotional support capabilities of preschool educators are crucial for helping students deal with challenges, build confidence, and succeed.
- (B) Relationship between Teaching Effectiveness and Teacher Emotions: A teacher's emotional state and attitude can impact teaching effectiveness. Maintaining a positive and stable emotional state has a positive influence on creating a conducive teaching atmosphere, enhancing students' interest in learning, and increasing their engagement. In other words, if a teacher is in an anxious or highly stressed state, it may have negative effects on teaching and classroom management.
- (C) Emotional Support from preschool educators: Emotional support from educators is essential in the developmental process of young children. Teacher care and understanding can assist students in dealing with emotional challenges, fostering good emotional management skills. Therefore, emotional support from teachers contributes to establishing a positive teacher-student relationship.
- (D) Self-care for preschool educators: Engaging in educational work can bring about certain pressures, and emotional labor for educators includes the management of their own emotional states and self-care. Good emotional labor helps alleviate the work stress of educators and

enhances their support for young children.

In summary, the relationship between the education industry and emotional labor is manifested in various aspects of the teaching process. From the teacher's "emotional state" to "emotional support" and the establishment of the "classroom community," attention and emphasis on the role of emotional labor are necessary to enhance young children's learning experiences and overall development.

D. Multiple Role Playing by preschool Educators

Jessie Stanton's statement in 1968 about the ideal preschool teacher is as follows: "She should have a considerable educational background, meaning that she should hold a Ph.D. in psychology and medicine, preferably with a foundation in sociology. Additionally, she should be an experienced carpenter, cement worker, technician, plumber, and also a well-trained musician and poet. ... This way, by the age of 83, she could become a teacher."

Discussions on the "diversity," "importance," and "professionalism" of preschool educators can be picked up from the previous descriptions. However, the general public has often lacked a positive response to the professional image of early childhood educators. They are commonly perceived more as "caretakers," emphasizing caregiving functions rather than focusing on the professional image associated with "education." In order to shape the professional role of early childhood educators, it requires ongoing reflection and the establishment of long-term concepts and internalized behaviors through teachers' professional introspection. Despite differing viewpoints, many scholars still believe that certain roles are essential for early childhood educators to possess.

Scholar Katz (1972) Believe that to achieve a professional level, preschool educators must meet the following eight standards: "Social demand," "Benefit to others," "Autonomy," "Ethical norms," "Teacher-student distance," "Implementation standards," "Continuing education," and "Professional knowledge." ; Bawden & Robinson (2002) believes that preschool educators should have five roles: "Maintaining a healthy and safe environment," "Building good interpersonal relationships," "Designing and assessing learning activities," "Enhancing relationships between families and schools," and "Handling all class affairs." In summary, based on the arguments of scholars, it is evident that when taking on the role of a preschool educator, one faces extremely complex and challenging tasks. Besides fulfilling the roles required for the job, dealing with children requires playing diverse roles such as caregiver (similar to a nanny), nurturer, counselor, and educator. The key lies in the fact that, while playing these roles, preschool educators must apply their professional knowledge. They need to use their expertise through continuous observation and insightful analysis of the children, providing rich learning experiences and activities in daily teaching to meet the unique development and needs of each child. Therefore, the unique nature of multiple role-playing for preschool educators is strongly related to the field of "education industry." Huang Kun-Hui (1991) Believes that roles can be classified into four patterns for reference: (A) The role represents an individual's position and explicit duties within a group; (B) The positioning of the role often needs to align with the role expectations, rights, and obligations of the general public; (C) The enactment of the role is subject to variability and uncertainty over time; (D) There is a complementary phenomenon between roles, which depends on the role relationships within the group they are part of. Everyone plays different roles in various situations, and in some instances, individuals may even take on multiple roles simultaneously. The term "role," originally used in the context of drama, has gained increased relevance in the development of social sciences. The evolving concepts surrounding roles have significantly contributed to the understanding of this term in contemporary discourse (Chang Chun-Hsing, 1989). In psychology, the term "role" is defined in two main senses. Firstly, it refers to the "identity" assigned to individuals of a specific category within a group and the functions associated with that identity. This involves the relative relationship between the individual and the group. Secondly, it denotes the "behavioral patterns" exhibited by individuals of a particular category, representing the learned role behaviors that society expects from individuals in that role. "Role conflict" occurs when a person playing multiple roles or facing conflicting expectations from various roles experiences psychological tension and emotional stress due to the inability to fulfill all role demands simultaneously. (Lin Yue-Na & Wu Ming-Lung, 2004), the role conflict discussed in this section refers to the stress and emotions experienced by preschool educators when they are confronted with conflicting expectations from multiple roles and find it challenging to balance these expectations.

E. Sub-replacement fertility and Changes in social values

Scholars Waters (2002) statement discusses globalization as a social process where the geographical and cultural differences are gradually diminishing, making people aware of the loss of their original advantages. It implies that the spatial and temporal distances around the world are shrinking due to various tools and increasingly rapid means, enabling the flow of people, services, goods, and knowledge across different regions.

The trend of declining birth rates is expected to have a significant impact on the education system. The evolution of the current situation, after referencing the perspectives of scholars both domestically and internationally, will be analyzed and discussed in this section. The phenomenon of declining birth rates may result in changes in the values of parents and students. There could be shifts in traditional family values and filial piety concepts, which are evident during interviews. In a society experiencing declining birth rates, individuals may prioritize their own quality of life over traditional family responsibilities.

Simultaneously, declining birth rates may shake up the "social structure." The potential disruption of social structure arises from changes in family and population structures. This issue could impact social stability, as the societal shift may lead to conflicts between different generations, possibly introducing uncertainty into social order. This social transformation might challenge traditional beliefs and raise questions about the roles of individuals within families and communities. The effects of declining birth rates on "early childhood education" and "emotional labor" will be explored in subsequent discussions. With the arrival of declining birth rates and an aging population, a reduction in population is an inevitable trend in the future. In comparison to the past, there has been a noticeable decline in the current student population. However, the impact of the declining birth rate on education has both positive and negative effects. Tsai Ming-Gin (2008) proposed positive effects include "reduced education expenditure," "lower class sizes in national education," "alleviation of academic pressure," and "slower depletion of exhaustible resources." On the other hand, the negative effects encompass "insufficient enrollment in various schools," "fewer teacher vacancies," "varying qualities of higher education institutions," "widening urban-rural disparities," and "significant challenges to family parenting and life education."

Regarding the research on globalization and early childhood education, Professor Hsieh Fei-Han (2017) pointed out in a study conducted in 2017 that under the impact of globalization and the free-market competition mechanism, early childhood education has, in order to "meet customer (parent) demands," added courses requested by parents, such as various talent-based classes. However, parents feel that these talent courses or English classes in kindergartens may not align with the developmental and learning needs of young children, neglecting their unique characteristics and development. In the early childhood stage, there is a need to cultivate reading habits, stimulate creativity, and engage in appropriate gross motor activities. However, the role of providing professional guidance in parenting education by educational institutions has been overlooked in this context.

III. Methodology

A. Research method

This study aims to explore why educational support staff gradually transition from the education industry to being perceived as part of the service industry. It further investigates the impact of resulting emotional labor on their work. The study also delves into the influence of job characteristics, self-identity, and stress on the emotional labor of preschool educators. Job characteristics, self-identity, and stress are considered independent variables, emotional labor as the dependent variable, and "multiple role-playing" as the mediating variable. Variables such as years of experience, public or private sector, and marital status will be considered as moderating factors. The research will utilize interview results and relevant literature to clarify the current transformation process and reasons for the changing definition of preschool educators. Finally, specific recommendations will be provided for future reference by professionals in the field of early childhood education.

Kvale, S. (1996) argues that researchers should design interview questions based on the theories found in relevant literature, ensuring that the content of the interview is consistent with existing research. Moreover, the "literature review" helps to establish the background and significance of the research question. This can guide the focus and scope of the interview, making it more targeted.

To achieve the purpose of this study, a qualitative research approach will be employed. 14 preschool education service providers from both public and private kindergartens will be interviewed using a semi-structured format. Please refer to our table below for detailed respondent data, with their consent obtained prior to the interviews. Based on the clear presentation of the data, the duration of the interviews in this study ranged from approximately one hour to one and a half hours. This duration could vary depending on both the interviewees and the researchers. Additionally, there was only one interview per respondent. The interviews aim to stimulate participants to narrate their career development experiences, extending to reflections, to gather relevant information. The qualitative research discussion is inspired by a phenomenological perspective, attempting to understand the life world of the participants from their viewpoints and further explore the subjective consciousness behind their behaviors (Wang Wen-Ke, 1994). Qualitative interviews are one of the most widely used methods for collecting data in social

science research. They primarily focus on the interviewees' "personal feelings" and narratives of "life experiences." Through dialogues and exchanges with the interviewees, researchers can gain insight into and interpret the interviewees' personal perceptions of social realities (Lin Jin-Ding, Yan Jia-Feng, & Chen Mei-Hua, 2005).

The advantages of in-depth interviews lie in allowing researchers to engage in longer interactions with interviewees, where responses and answers often emerge spontaneously, revealing the core of the issues. Through detailed descriptions of events, this method aims to elicit comprehensive and deep insights from educational and service staff. It can unveil phenomena that standardized tests may overlook and is characterized by its "open-ended" nature, potentially contributing to the development of new theories and identifying phenomena overlooked in past literature or research. Importantly, in-depth interviews help avoid preconceived subjective biases.

B. Research Process

This research adopts a multi-stage qualitative approach. In the first stage, the research topic and objectives are defined, followed by an in-depth review of relevant literature to ground the study within the existing body of knowledge. The second stage focuses on discussing and selecting qualitative research methods, identifying participants for the study, and determining the scope of inquiry. In the third stage, semi-structured interviews are conducted, and the data is transcribed and coded for thematic analysis. Finally, in the fourth stage, the interview data is carefully analyzed to extract meaningful insights, and the conclusions and recommendations are formulated based on the patterns and themes that emerged. The entire research process is visually represented in the diagram below.

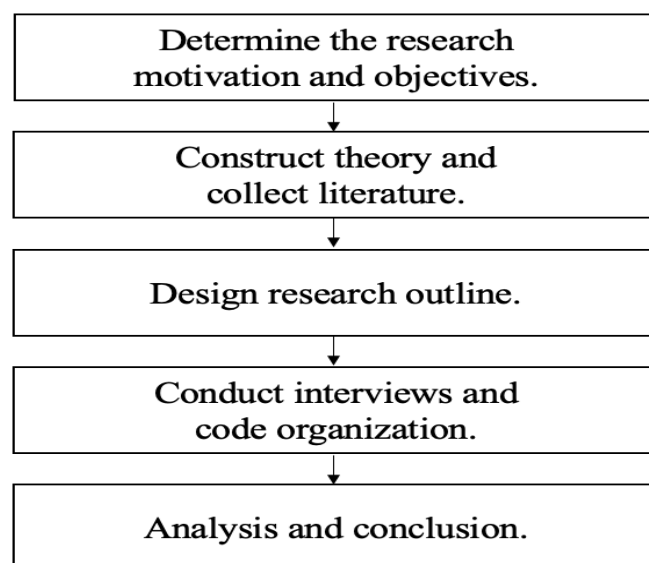


Figure 2. Research Flowchart. Image Source: Compiled by the present study.

C. Conceptual Framework

As we all know that educators' duties include "emotional work," and this emotional workload is also known as emotional labor. These phenomena are subtle and challenging to observe. As teachers need to manage their emotions during the teaching process, the "emotional issues" of educational service personnel will affect "teaching and learning," making it closely related to "education." The causal model in this study aims to explain whether the causes of educational service personnel, such as "multiple role-playing," "job characteristics," and "emotional labor," mutually influence each other. Additionally, the study explores whether work stress and work-family conflict become connecting elements. Factors such as seniority, marital status, educational background, and the distinction between public and private institutions are considered as interfering variables for clarity, as shown in the diagram below.

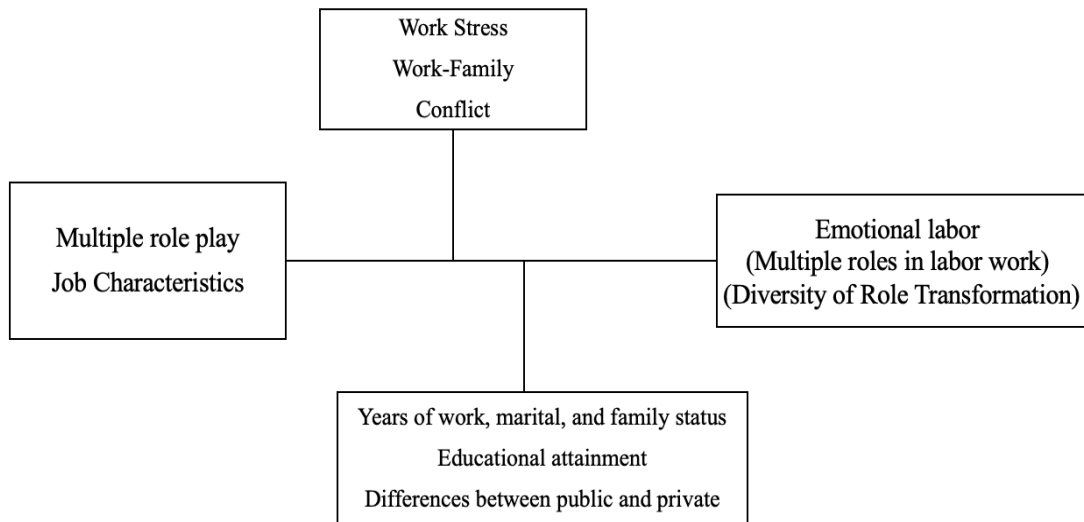


Figure 3 Conceptual Framework

D. Study Object

As mentioned earlier, this study employs a semi-structured interview approach. A preliminary interview outline and key points were prepared, and a basic understanding of the background of the interviewees was established. The principles of the interview method were adhered to for effective data collection. The interviewees consist of 12 individuals, with 6 currently employed in public institutions and 6 in private institutions. The sampling method includes both "snowball sampling" and "purposive sampling." The former is based on the researcher's needs, subjectively and intentionally selecting the desired samples, while the latter involves collecting samples based on the interconnected relationships among the interviewees.

Table 1 .Interviewee Code Table

Item	Kindergarten genre(public/private)	Interviewer code	Background and seniority
01	private kindergarten	A01	Graduate, 25 years of seniority, married with two kids
02	private kindergarten	A02	Graduate, 10 years of seniority, unmarried
03	private kindergarten	A03	Graduate, 18 years of seniority, married with two kids
04	private kindergarten	A04	associate's degree,15 years of seniority, married with one kid
05	private kindergarten	A05	associate's degree, 22 years of seniority, married with two kids
06	private kindergarten	A06	Graduate, 10 years of seniority, married
07	public kindergarten	A07	Graduate, 26 years of seniority, married with one kid
08	public kindergarten	A08	Graduate, 18 years of seniority, married with one kid
09	public kindergarten	A09	Graduate, 26 years of seniority, married
10	public kindergarten	A10	After graduate, 20 years of seniority, married with one kid
11	public kindergarten	A11	Graduate, 29 years of seniority, married with one kid

12	public kindergarten	A12	Graduate, 30 years of seniority, married with two kids
13	public kindergarten	A13	Graduate, 32 years of seniority, married
14	public kindergarten	A14	high school, 7 years of seniority, married with one kid

IV. DATA ANALYSIS

This chapter will elucidate the four major aspects synthesized from the interviews with 14 educational and care service professionals: "Decreased Respect for Early Childhood Education Profession," "Evolution of Times and Changes in Family Educational Views," "Inseparability of Work-Family Conflict, Emotional Labor, and Retention Intent," and "Multiple Role Play Leading to Work Pressure and Constraint." Each of these aspects will be detailed as follows.

A. Decreased Respect for the Professionalism of Early Childhood Education

When the term "education" is entangled with the word "service," it may lead to a reduction in the perceived professionalism of education among parents or the general public. Coupled with the rapid development of technology and its significant impact on interpersonal relationships, the advancement of information technology has both brought people closer and enriched their lives. However, the apparent proximity does not necessarily mean a closer emotional connection, and the diversity of life does not guarantee increased happiness. While embracing technological advancements, there should also be corresponding considerations for the transformation of the human spirit. Even if these developments cannot be perfectly synchronized, they should not fall too far behind (Hung Xiu-Xiong, 1997).

"Yes, especially with the younger generation of parents, their attitudes differ significantly from the past. It's quite apparent that the traditional values of respecting teachers and filial piety may be weaker among children and parents nowadays. As a result, it becomes our responsibility to teach children the values and principles that should be learned at home." (A01) *"The changes in family education have been significant, especially with the rapid development of internet information in the past decade. Parents have absorbed a vast amount of information, and as teachers, we have to take on all responsibilities, whether right or wrong."* (A02)

In the face of the level of professionalism in education, all the interviewed preschool educators expressed the belief that early childhood education is indeed a professional field. Each staff member possesses educational and training expertise, and they all agree that professionalism should be applied in educating young children. Early childhood education aims to cultivate the harmonious development of knowledge, emotions, and attitudes in each preschool child, emphasizing cognitive and social development with a balance of emotions and rationality. However, the current reality seems to indicate that the level of professionalism is no longer as highly valued and respected as before. Some parents even perceive it as a caretaking profession rather than a professional one.

"Taking a professional approach towards parents is essential. It is crucial to affirm one's own beliefs and not let parents dictate the course of action. This ensures that the operation of my classroom remains unaffected." (A04) ; *"It's challenging when parents show no respect for teachers despite our possession of expertise in preschool education. Often, individuals who lack knowledge seem like a know-it-all"* (A09) ; *"Absolutely, the goal is always to achieve professionalism and maintain high standards in preschool education."* (A10) ; *"It seems that there is a perception that the field of preschool education is not as recognized and respected by parents compared to other service industries with specialized areas of value and recognition. There might be a misconception that the nature of the job is merely playing with children rather than providing a professional service."* (A11)

The interviews revealed that (A06) despite the current generation of parents not placing as much emphasis on the professionalism of education as in the past, early childhood education professionals still uphold their educational principles by adhering to the knowledge and expertise they have acquired.

"In the service industry, like in education, one has to deal with various people. I approach parents from my professional perspective, and I don't entertain unreasonable requests and stick on my own principles." (A06)

As mentioned earlier, conflicts between parents and teachers are heard from time to time. In this age with advances in information technology, parents often resort to complaints whenever there are issues or concerns, especially in public institutions. To be frank, the social morality has undergone significant changes. The traditional teaching environment, where teachers were highly respected, has transformed into a form that emphasizes respect and communication. However, effective communication, as widely known, remains one of the most challenging aspects.

"We must prioritize service when dealing with parents. Any slight neglect or dissatisfaction from parents can lead to immediate complaints to relevant authorities." (A09) ; "Not being respected, and I believe the overall environment is subject to bullying from the relevant agencies." (A12)

B. Evolution of family education concept through the progress of the times

Globalization has accelerated the interaction in economic, political, and cultural aspects, facilitating the increased flow of information and technology. This tightens the connections between countries. The evolution of population structures will lead to changes in family education perspectives. The following are real responses and heartfelt sentiments from preschool education service personnel regarding modern family education views.

The scholars mentioned above have pointed out in their studies that once the population structure in our country undergoes changes such as declining birth rates and aging, it not only significantly impacts higher education but is also observed in preschool education (Li Meng-Jen, 2017; Yang Chao-Hsiang, 2014). In other words, changes in population structure affect family education, which subsequently influences higher education, creating a chain of consequential effects. Due to the impact of the global phenomenon of declining birth rates, the education sector today is facing increasing competition. The roles played by educators have become more diverse, extending beyond the traditional role of educators. In this challenging environment, educators are now taking on a multifaceted role, catering to different demands from superiors, children, and parents. They are no longer just educators but also resemble caregivers who provide comprehensive care and support to families.

"I feel that now it's a combination of the service industry and education." (A05) ; "I basically feel like a nanny, with even heavier responsibilities. Sometimes, I have to listen to parents complaining about their family matters, such as mother-in-law and daughter-in-law issues. Nowadays, families have become more complicated, and we have to deal with a lot of problems. Moreover, since parents have fewer children, each child is considered precious." (A12) ; "It's too exhausting, and the mental stress is too heavy. Besides taking care of the children, there are endless problems raised by parents. Moreover, parents tend to trust their own ideas more. The children have many situations. Informing or explaining to parents is the first step, but the truth is, they don't really trust the teachers much. Nowadays, parents only trust the cameras. Seeing is believing" (A13) ; "Similar to the catering industry, if the children don't wash their dishes, we still have to help. Our professionalism isn't well recognized. However, these things don't affect my attitude and teaching in the classroom." (A14)

The motivation behind promoting the integration of early childhood and childcare services is influenced not only by the global attention to early childhood education but also by changes in social, economic, and family demographics. Factors such as the increased labor force participation of women, the rise of dual-income families, and alterations in family population structures contribute to the growing demand for early childhood and childcare services. Consequently, the government needs to address diverse family needs by providing versatile and flexible early childhood education services to meet the requirements of parents juggling work and childcare responsibilities. (Zhuo, Heng-Jin, 2023). Similarly, many activities aimed at creating diverse early childhood education environments have resulted in an increased workload for early childhood service providers. Given the unchanged allocation of human resources, they often experience feelings of being overwhelmed or a lack of work-life balance.

"The parents I currently encounter are generally respectful, but there are numerous activities in the preschool education sector. In order to attract enrollments or meet parental expectations, along with regular teaching, administrative, and class-related responsibilities, it feels like a constant rush." (A14) ; "Regarding work, aside from the stress, overly anxious parents, and paperwork, there's still a strong desire to be in the actual field of early childhood education." (A03)

As mentioned earlier, the initial intention behind policy-making was well-meaning and aimed to meet the needs of parents. However, on the aspect of "service," it has gradually expanded and deviated from its original purpose. The following are the sentiments of these service providers with an average of 17 years of experience, and when discussing the evolution of the times and changes in parental views on education, most responses and feedback indicate a "weakening respect for professionalism."

"Having been a teacher (preschool educator) for so long, I can only say that the values of parents have changed a lot, and it is severely distorted now." (A04) ; "The current situation of parents indulging their children is actually becoming more and more serious. After working for so many years, it is significantly different compared to the past." (A05) ; "If we talk about home education and the attitude of parents, now compared to the past, it has deviated a lot, and there is a big difference." (A06)"I feel that the current communication and guidance with parents and children are more challenging than before. Everyone just wants to retire early!" (A08) ; "People nowadays think he who pays the piper calls the tune. I (parents) do whatever I want." (A10)

The impact of the trend of declining birthrates on preschool education is often perceived as involving modern parents who no longer respect teachers, have a strong desire to control their children, and exhibit distrust towards teachers. There is even interference in teachers' lesson plans, leading to the emergence of a customer-centric mentality. It is evident that family education in our country has undergone significant changes, especially in the era of declining birthrates.

C. The Inseparability of Work-Family Conflict, Emotional Labor, and Intention to Stay.

"Job characteristics" can reflect an individual's qualities or characteristics in the workplace (Voydanoff, 1988), balancing work and family is crucial and contributes to achieving a work-family balance. When job design provides employees with greater control over their work, they have more flexibility to manage conflicts between work and family when facing overtime or excessive workload. The autonomy in work also reduces stress and role conflicts between work and family. However, emotional labor refers to the need for workers, who maintain high levels of contact with "customers," to control their emotions. Many educational and childcare service providers consider parents as customers. To meet the expectations of parents (customers) or the organization, they must regulate their emotions. The primary goal is to maintain a reassuring and trustworthy expression for parents and create a pleasant and bright service atmosphere. This study examines the association between the "role demands" of preschool educators and the "work-family conflict" to demonstrate its "adaptive consequences" in order to investigate the relationship between work-family conflict and the intention to stay. Most instances of work-family conflict arise from the need to handle work-related matters after hours, which is known as interference of work with family. When the "personal demands of work" and "family requirements" of educational and childcare service providers are incompatible, conflicts and contradictions inevitably arise, leading to the development of role stress. Regarding the association between emotional labor and the intention to stay, it is evident that when preschool educators invest a significant amount of effort and spirit into teaching but fail to receive positive feedback, it can lead to a sense of loss for them. Poor adaptation or excessive stress transforming into job burnout not only discourages those aspiring to pursue a teaching profession but also significantly increases the turnover rate (Guo Zhi-Chun, 2003).

"Yes, and it's quite obvious, especially the administrative tasks at the school occupy a substantial amount of my family time." (A01) ; "(Questioning whether there is an intention to resign) Yes, there is. Sometimes, emotions cannot be swept away immediately when I back home, and I GOTTA WORK MY ASS OFF to get underpaid." (A03) ; "Long working hours are a challenge. Besides being vigilant during the day at the preschool center, in the evenings, teachers need to prepare lessons. Additionally, many teachers here are also involved in managing class clubs and responding to messages from parents. (A04) ; "Yes, (work-family conflict) happens. Now there are a lot of tasks, and almost all of them require working after hours or on holidays. Sometimes, I think about changing jobs. I also wish I could work like my friends in the bank." (A07) ; "I am satisfied with my job, but still, there is a thought of resigning from time to time, because the pressure of performance and the feeling of not being respected throw cold water on me" (A08) ; "Now, the attached kindergarten extends childcare hours, and the working hours have become quite long. As for the thought about resigning, frankly I have thought about it but just a fleeting thoughts " (A10) ; "Unable to balance work and family, there is no time to take care of family members." (A11) ; "Although not planning to resign, considering changing the service area (New Taipei city has stronger competition and greater variability). Tedious tasks and excessive workload make it difficult to balance family life." (A14)

Nowadays, the two most important aspects of life are undoubtedly work and family (Lu Luo, 2013). In the sampling process, it was observed that most preschool educators were married and had children, whether they currently had children or not. Additionally, many of them also had elderly family members to take care of. In such situations, balancing between their profession and family becomes challenging, especially considering the emotional labor involved in dealing with the demands of multiple roles. This dual commitment to family and work significantly affects the intention to stay of many preschool educators.

D. Multiple Role Playing Leads to Work Stress and Constraints

The complexity of roles in the job can indeed result in increased work pressure and burden. However, many preschool educators, have a sense of mission regarding their work. This sense of mission, along with the pursuit of the ideal of "self-actualization," helps alleviate work pressure and constraints. However, the trigger of work pressure can be divided into "internal" and "external" factors. It is the individual's negative emotions triggered by expectations related to their own roles. Preschool educators facing the work environment and the responsibilities of their duties, experience a sense of being "oppressed" and a "tense psychological state," leading to an unpleasant physiological response.

"We are under a lot of pressure! It comes from concerns about the children's safety, as well as parental doubts and blame, administrative tasks at the childcare center, and so on...." (A12)

Preschool educators face significant psychological stress primarily due to "emotional display requirements." The need to assume different roles contributes to a heightened emotional burden, as evident in various studies. The emotional load, characterized by "emotional diversity," is particularly intense in preschool education. This emotional labor impact significantly leads to substantial levels of job burnout, indicating that the perceived and emotional efforts of Preschool educators are extensive, fostering a mighty sense of work-related exhaustion.

"I personally believe that as educators, while our educational direction encompasses service aspects, it should by no means adopt a service-oriented model that simply caters to parental demands. In classrooms, challenging parents may arise, impacting teachers' emotional well-being and sometimes leading to feelings of disrespect. Aside from the genuine love for children and not forgetting the initial motivation to engage in preschool education, strengthening one's professional skill and performance in caregiving and educational duties are crucial. Only by doing so can we maintain our enthusiasm for educational work." (A02) ; *"I believe that having confidence in our professional competence is crucial to gaining parental recognition. When we do our things right, our emotions are less likely to be affected."* (A06) ; *"usually, our job is Irreplaceable, due to our professional competence is higher. But sometimes it still does"* (A08)

V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on previous document analysis and analysis of interviews, and discussions presented in the previous sections, this paper draws the following conclusions and provides recommendations for further consideration.

A. Conclusion

(A) Sub-replacement fertility deepens emotional labor for preschool educators

The research subjects of this study are frontline preschool educators. However, the actual perception of emotional labor among these personnel is indeed related to the implementation of "integrated preschool education policies" and the "demographic changes," ultimately leading to the transformation of frontline preschool educators from the field of preschool education to the service industry. The issues within these two categories will result in higher emotional labor for preschool educators. Especially in the aspect of declining birth rates and social demographic changes, we can observe the big differences in "family education" and "parental perspectives." However, these changes are more attributed to the influence of globalization. By tracing a series of connections, we find that the fundamental cause of these issues lies in the effects of globalization and Social Changes. This study pointed out that emotional labor among preschool educator refers to the process of adjusting one's emotions when interacting with students, parents, supervisors, or anyone else during teaching activities. The primary reason for the need to regulate emotions is the social "role requirements" imposed, coupled with the personal effort expended to meet the expectations of the professional education image. Therefore, this study defines emotional labor as the behaviors arising from adjusting one's emotions while engaging in educational work and interacting with others, in order to exhibit emotions that align with role norms and conform to the professional image in education. Emotional labor results in a conflict between the ideal and the reality of self-actualization for preschool educators.

Most preschool educators generally consider their work as part of the "education industry." However, there is a perceived gap between the concept of the education industry and the actual work they are engaged in. Nevertheless, the majority of these service providers acknowledge that displaying appropriate emotions is an integral part of their job responsibilities. However, in the changing environment, many experienced preschool educators interviewed express that their current emotional labor has far exceeded the initial expectations when they entered the industry. Additionally, they note differences between their current experiences and the education they received before entering this career. It is widely recognized that dealing with others' emotions in this line of work is inherently challenging. This challenge becomes even more pronounced for preschool educators who are simultaneously responsible for caring for preschool children and addressing the concerns of their parents. There has even been an observed phenomenon of emotional exhaustion during their service, and this exhaustion may make it difficult for these educators to uphold their ideals and values, leading to a conflict with their ideals of self-actualization.

(B) work-family conflicts of preschool educators

preschool educators often experience unavoidable conflicts between their career and family roles. Common reasons include "long working hours" and "psychological stress from role expectations", in the field of preschool education, if organizations want to plan intervention measures, they can utilize the Work-Life Balance Network established by the Ministry of Labor to conduct needs assessments

Exploring the aspect of work stress, preschool educators face various work pressures, including addressing behavioral correction issues in children, meeting parental expectations and demands, and dealing with school administrative tasks. These pressures directly impact their emotions and energy in the family, leading to the occurrence of work-family conflicts. One of the reasons for work-family conflict is the "flexibility of job demands." In terms of flexibility, preschool education service providers may need to adjust their work or working hours to meet the multiple needs of children and their families. This kind of request may hinder their stability in the family, likely to work overtime and neglect their family needs.

(C) The concerns about the Education become "services"

Once the education industry is perceived as a "service sector," it can lead to the commercialization and profit orientation of educational institutions (such as schools or childcare centers). The focus is shifted towards attracting students and parents through various promotional and marketing efforts, as well as diverse extracurricular activities and talents. A significant factor contributing to this phenomenon is the desire to cater to parental demands and leading to a decline in the quality of education, finally the emphasis on the "integrated development of students" may gradually be neglected. Viewing education as a service industry inevitably leads to a change in people's values, treating education merely as a "product" to satisfy consumer demands, neglecting the importance of education in social and personal development.

B. Recommendation

To address the above-mentioned potential issues, this study suggests that while promoting the education service industry and diverse innovative teaching models, there should be a strong emphasis on the "social responsibility" and "mission" of education professionals. This ensures the provision of high-quality education while focusing on fair and equal educational opportunities. Governments, educational institutions, and society should work together to ensure that the development of the education service industry does not bring about negative social impacts.

To reduce work-family conflict, this study proposes the following recommendations:

- (A) Establish Clear Work Hours and Expectations: preschool educators should have well-defined work hours, and overtime should be avoided whenever possible. Ensuring clear boundaries between work hours and personal time helps teachers maintain a balance between family and work commitments.
- (B) Enhance Education and Training for preschool educator: Educational institutions can provide relevant education and training to help teachers deal with work pressure effectively. Training in areas such as "Emotional and Role Management," "Time Management," and "Teaching Skills" can enhance teachers' ability to adapt to changes in society and the times.
- (C) Flexible Work Arrangements: To get with the times, provide flexible work arrangements in educational institutions, such as "flexible working hours" or options for "remote meetings or training." This can make it easier for teachers to balance work and family.
- (D) Regular Communication: Establish regular communication between preschool educators, parents, and institutions to ensure clear expectations and needs on both sides. This can help reduce misunderstandings and uncertainties, serving as a preventive measure for conflicts between work and family.
- (E) Work break and Relaxation: Encourage preschool educators to take breaks within working hours to maintain mental and physical well-being, ensuring their "Right to Disconnect."

By implementing the above measures, the suggestions provided can facilitate preschool educators in achieving a better balance between work and family, thereby reducing the risk of work-family conflicts. This serves as a reference for future professionals in the field of preschool education.

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