1. Introduction

The traditionally, the care for the children was provided by family in Korea. Thus, care outside home was recognized negatively before nuclear family need alternative cares for their children due to lack of hands from their family. The low birth rate also caused positive social recognition, regarding care outside home. The government planed and tried many policies of childcare until now. As a result, remarkable progression has been made in childcare.

The Korean government provided approximately a billion won (approximately 794,327,624 dollars) for sporting childcare. The budget for teachers and children depends on the municipality but most of teachers' are partially provided regardless of private or public day-care centers. Also, 90% infant–toddler’s fees are supported by government until 2007. The monetary support given to day-care centers by government as well as municipality is higher than the one given children in preschool. Accordingly, The registration rates of children in day-care centers have increased every year. The numbers of child-care center were 9867 whereas the ones of preschool were 8290.

The government also enacted Child Care Accreditation to improve the quality of day-care centers in 2003. Many day-care centers have to be approved by the Accreditation to get money support from municipality. 24.5% centers among private and public cay-care centers have been approved by government in 2008 (Jung, 2008), but remaining centers hesitate to be approved by the Accreditation. Accordingly, government is planning to change these systems, which is not specifically decided yet. Thus, the policy of the Accreditation needs to be revised.

The present system of childcare has been established through several-dramatic
changes of policy. Policy is very important for universality and quality of childcare, which OECD also strongly recommends for children’s wellbeing. Even though some policies had positive impacts on the realization of universality of as well as the improvement of the childcare, some policies had generated negative impacts on those. In this paper, the changes of the policies are analyzed from historical perspectives to know how the change was occurred.

2. The Method of study

The methods of the study include both literature review and an interview. For the analysis of policy changes, literatures of the policies from 1960 to 2008 were reviewed. In addition, an interview was used to explore some policies in detail. Telephone interview was used for the depth inquiry.

3. The result and interpretations

There appears to be three main shifts of the childcare policies in Korea: the deficit period, the participatory period, and children’s right period. The deficit period included childcare policies for children in need. The policies of participatory period focused on the participation of the parents, teachers, and administrators in the decision-making process of policies and administration as down-top process. Finally, children’s right period emphasized the rights of children in childcare.

1) Deficit period: from 1960 to 1991

The deficit period covers the times when the care was provided by government to children institutionalized. After Korean War, the government established public childcare centers to provide cares to children whose parents died or are poor. The number of children institutionalized children were increased afterward and the numbers were increased to 25, 443 in 1966(Ju, 1990; Lee, 1997). The national economy had been good before number of institutionalized children decreased. Thus, the social recognition of most of care outside home was based on institutionalized care in this time. This concept of care outside home changed after government accelerated industrialization plan in order to go into the stage of the developed country. Accordingly, there increased gradually social needs for care outside home because the number of
working mother increased. The government enacted “improvement plan of child care centers” in 1978 and allowed children from normal family to be taken cared of if it was necessary. The care outside home increased dramatically after the government approved the law ‘the advanced early childhood education.’ The government unified all kinds of childcare centers under different Ministries (Social Services, Interior Ministry, Rural Development Administration) into the name of “new village nursery” in 1982. This act was made in order to emphasize educational aspects on childcare because the government regarded early childhood education as tools for gaining economical and political power. Accordingly, Ministry of Education was charged of education for children in childcare centers whereas Interior Ministry and Ministry of Social Services were charged of authorizing facilities, management, medical issues. The numbers of woman who worked continued to increase until 1990. As a result, there increased more social needs for care outside home. The government enacted ‘Childcare Act’ for infant–toddler and young children in 1991 under the Ministry of Social Services, which was different from the “early childhood education Act” under the Ministry of Education. The ‘Childcare Act’ for infant–toddler and young children emphasized more on care than education even though it included the educational aspects.

From 1960 to 1991, the childcare policies were proposed and approved in order to solve problems of caregivings generated from poverty and working mothers. Thus, the care was more emphasized than education. This concept of policies during these times was based on the recognition that family had main responsibilities for care for children. These government’s goals and visions of childcare policies targeted toward the family who could not have hands for their children’s care. This concept of childcare policies is based on the deficit model, which reflects children’s deficit need in childcare.

2) Participatory Period: Regional law in administration

The civic participation in day–care centers was possible after regional law was reflected in childcare policies. The first regional law in Korea was approved after establishment of Korean government in 1948. But, during those times, the efficiency and competency of regional administration was emphasized and the control of central government had much power rather than citizen’s participation in the administration (Lee et Al., 2005). Most of policies were top–down process before “the government of participation” was established in 2003(Mo, 2007). From that time, the citizens began to participate in administration in the region. The ‘Childcare Act’ included regional law. The Act allowed regional government to play roles and have right for opening and closing centers, whose children had priority of
entrance into childcare center. In addition, the regional government had right and responsibilities to develop childcare programs and distribute those to. The ‘Childcare Act’ has been revised eighth times from 1991 to 2004. Central government (Ministry of Gender Equality) was supposed to develop standard curriculum and ask regional policy committee to transform it appropriately for regional context. The regional government was also asked to establish and supervise “the management committee for childcare centers” consisted of educators, managers, parents, and community members who were related to the childcare center. But, this transmission system of childcare did not work out very well. The first reason was attributed to the fact that the administrative process of the transmission system was controlled by the Ministry of Public Administration and Security, which should be under the control of Ministry of Gender Equality at that time. Therefore, administrators in regional government transmitted day-care policies to each center without understanding. This contributed to the citizen’s reluctance of participation as well as the generation of top-down process of administration in municipality itself.

3) Children’s Right Period
Korean government has been the member of ‘Convention on the Rights of the Child’ since the government signed on the convention in 1991. ‘The best interests of child’ in the convention was reflected in the eighth revision of the ‘Childcare Act’ in 2004. In order to realize the best interests of child in childcare, the criteria of authorization of facility and quality of programs, professional development of teachers were strengthened. All childcare centers were encouraged to have ‘Child Care Accreditation’ in order to improve the quality of childcare. The criteria of health, security, and nutrition were also strengthened.

Even though these criteria for children were improved but the realization of ‘the best interest of the child’ has not reached yet. Many childcare centers tend to reject the accreditation from the government and the professional development is not systematic. Teachers in site are supposed to receive formal education a time per every three years, which became main cause of teacher’s incompetence of education even though the ratio of a teacher to children became lower in the revision. Universality of child care for all
children has not reached yet in spite of the law which specified the equal right of receiving childcare.

As the member of the ‘Convention on the Rights of the Child’, the government made eighth revision of ‘Childcare Act to reflect and realize children’s right in day-care. But, these legal efforts turned out to have a little fruit. Good policy and law itself is not enough for childcare reflecting children’s right. Appropriate administrative policies, and especially context-specific policy and systems are more important to reflect the child’s best interest as well as family’s needs.

4. Conclusion and Discussion

There were three main shifts of policy changes in child care since the care outside home were provided by government: Deficit period, participatory period, and child’s right period. Deficit period was mainly influenced by social change whereas both the participatory period and children’s right period were mostly influenced by political factors: the system of municipality and ‘Convention on the Rights of the Child’ in U. N. Even though those policies are legitimate, some of those policies are found to be ineffective in administration system. Thus, the administrative system must be revised for the policies to work out. First of all, the Ministry of Social Service (transferred from Ministry of Gender Equality) must be charged of systemizing the administrative process of transmission of childcare policies. Secondly, more concrete effort must be given on the side of administrators and the center’s managers in order to encourage family and community member to participate the process. Otherwise, child’s best interest can not be satisfied.

Policy of childcare is very important for children to be given appropriate care. But, the modern psychology teaches us a fact that the care is not something to be given. We need the lesson from the fact. Children are not small kids whom we should protect from invisible risks. Rather, they are the citizen to act out their right in their life. If we think the children as citizen as us, the childcare policies must have more visions from the ‘Convention on the Rights of the Child.’
Reference


