Research on Social Practice Activities in Preschool Education Major

Song Wenyu*

Universitas Pendidikan Ganesha, Bali

ABSTRACT

The implementation of social practice activities in preschool education not only aims to thoroughly implement the Party's educational policies centered on "fostering virtue through education" but also serves as a core pathway to enhance the holistic development of preschool education students—specifically promoting the coordinated improvement of their professional literacy, practical operation capabilities, and sense of dedication to the preschool cause. Against the backdrop of society's growing demand for high-quality preschool talents, numerous universities and colleges have incorporated preschool education into their undergraduate or vocational curricula to meet market needs. However, a prominent problem persists: most graduates of these programs lack proficiency in practical skills (such as organizing games, designing age-appropriate enlightenment courses, and responding to sudden childcare needs) and often show insufficient dedication to long-term engagement in preschool education, which directly affects their adaptability to kindergarten work. In response, more educational institutions and kindergartens have begun to explore the in-depth integration of social practice activities into kindergarten teaching and talent cultivation. This paper focuses on investigating the current status, existing bottlenecks, and effective integration models of social practice activities for preschool education students in kindergartens. Through methods including questionnaires, on-site observations of kindergartens, interviews with teachers and students, and case analyses, it summarizes practical implementation approaches (e.g., university-kindergarten co-built practice bases, project-based social practice) and diversified formats. The research aims to provide valuable references for optimizing the preschool education talent training system, improving the practical teaching quality of colleges, and advancing related academic research in this field.
Keywords: kindergarten, preschool education, social practice

INTRODUCTION

Against the background of China's persistent decline in birth rates, the "low fertility rate" phenomenon has led to an unprecedented level of social attention to young children's development. According to data from the National Bureau of Statistics, China's total fertility rate dropped to 1.09 in 2023, the lowest level since the founding of the People's Republic of China. In this context, families are increasingly "focused" on the quality of their children's growth—society now focuses not only on children's health and safety but also on their all-round development in cognitive, emotional, and social skills. This shift has set higher requirements for the professional competence and sense of responsibility of preschool educators: parents and kindergartens now expect educators to not only provide basic care but also design scientific, individualized educational activities that promote children's holistic development.

As the core force of future preschool education teams, students majoring in Preschool Education typically master theoretical knowledge in pedagogy, psychology, and early childhood development. However, a disconnect between theory and practice remains. A 2022 study by Zhang and Li found that 76.2% of preschool education students reported that they "could not apply textbook knowledge to real kindergarten scenarios," and 69.5% lacked confidence in handling emergencies (e.g., children's conflicts, sudden illnesses). This gap is rooted in insufficient exposure to practical scenarios: most students have limited opportunities to understand individual differences among children, communicate with parents, or manage classroom dynamics before graduation.

Social practice has thus become a key link connecting theoretical knowledge with real-world application, and an essential part of current preschool education training. Engaging in social practice

holds profound significance for students' growth. They can enter kindergartens to participate in organizing daily activities: from assisting teachers in designing age-appropriate game-based courses to observing how to soothe children with separation anxiety and mediate conflicts between peers. These real scenarios allow them to translate abstract theories (such as Piaget's cognitive development stages) into concrete operational skills. For example, a student who learned about "scaffolding teaching" in class can practice adjusting guidance strategies when a child struggles to complete a puzzle—first demonstrating, then prompting, and finally encouraging independent attempts.

Students can also work in community early education service stations, where they engage with children from different family structures (such as single-parent, dual-income, or migrant worker families). A 2023 community survey included in this research found that 42.3% of children from dual-income families lack daytime companionship, and 28.5% of single-parent families face challenges in balancing work and childcare. By interacting with these families, students learn to provide targeted educational suggestions (e.g., recommending parent-child reading activities that take 15 minutes a day) and understand the social context of preschool education.

More importantly, social practice effectively enhances students' comprehensive quality and sense of social responsibility. When accompanying children with special needs (e.g., autism spectrum disorder, speech delays) in sensory integration training, students experience the fairness and warmth of education. During observations at a special education kindergarten, 91.7% of interviewed students reported that they "gained a deeper understanding of inclusive education" and "realized the importance of patience and empathy." When helping kindergartens conduct parent workshops, they understand the importance of home-kindergarten collaboration for children's growth: a workshop on "positive discipline" organized by students in a Beijing kindergarten increased parent participation in kindergarten activities by 35% within a month. These experiences take students beyond "textbook knowledge" and help them truly realize that "preschool education is not just simple care, but the first step in safeguarding children's growth"—strengthening their original aspiration of "child-centered" education.

In an era when society attaches great importance to children's development, such practical experiences enable Preschool Education majors to adapt to the requirements of preschool education positions in advance. When they embark on their careers, they will not only be able to use their professional abilities to design scientific educational programs for children but also guard the growth of every child with a strong sense of responsibility, injecting more professional and warm strength into preschool education.

Practical teaching is an effective way to consolidate theoretical knowledge and deepen theoretical understanding. It is an essential link in cultivating high-quality talents with innovative consciousness and an essential platform for integrating theory with practice—helping students master scientific methods and improve their practical ability. Furthermore, it is conducive to the improvement of students' literacy and the formation of correct values. As the name suggests, practical teaching itself has solid practical characteristics: it aims at cultivating students' practical ability and requires the support of laboratories, practice bases, and various instruments and facilities. Therefore, the importance of operational design in practical teaching is particularly prominent. However, the theoretical basis of practical teaching should not be ignored. As a subordinate concept in the category of teaching systems, practical teaching consists of four core elements—teachers, students, courses (including teaching objectives, content, methods, and evaluation), and conditions—and interacts with theoretical teaching to form a complete educational system. From a cognitive perspective, practical teaching is also a process of knowledge construction: students actively acquire and internalize knowledge through hands-on experience, rather than passively accepting information. This process has distinct characteristics of interactivity, situational, and complexity.

For preschool education students, practical teaching (especially social practice in kindergartens) is the most effective way to understand the nature and content of preschool teachers' work. It is a transformation process from "professional learning" (mastering theories) to "professional cognition" (understanding the role of preschool educators) and a shortcut to cultivating the ability to find, use, and apply knowledge to solve practical problems. Graduate fieldwork, a key form of social practice, has multiple benefits: it improves students' practical ability, teamwork ability, professional technical ability (e.g., using educational tools), and social cognitive ability (e.g., understanding the operation of kindergartens). A 2023 study by Du showed that students who participated in 8 weeks or more of fieldwork had a 40% higher score on professional skill assessments than those who did not. Additionally,

fieldwork helps students master relevant professional and technical knowledge, improve their management skills, adaptability to emergencies, and ability to summarize experiences and lessons. Its ultimate goal is to achieve "zero distance" between academic training and actual work—enabling students to quickly adapt to kindergarten teaching positions after graduation. Moreover, kindergartens can discover and reserve potential talents through in-post practice: 62.5% of the kindergartens surveyed in this research reported that they "prioritize hiring students who have completed internships in their institutions."

This research yields both theoretical and empirical benefits, addressing key gaps in existing studies on preschool education social practice.

From a theoretical perspective, it helps clarify two core relationships: (1) the impact of cognitive support (e.g., theoretical guidance from college teachers) and management assurance (e.g., internship supervision systems) on practical teaching; and (2) the mediating role of practical teaching in connecting social practice with students' professional development. Existing studies have mostly focused on the "effects" of social practice but rarely analyzed the "mechanisms" behind these effects—for example, how cognitive and management support interact to influence the quality of practical teaching, or how practical teaching mediates the relationship between social practice and students' career commitment. This research fills this gap by constructing a theoretical model of "support factors → practical teaching → student development," enriching the theoretical system of preschool education practical teaching.

From an empirical aspect, the research provides actionable guidance for the reform of practical teaching in university preschool education majors. First, it identifies the main bottlenecks in current social practice (e.g., lack of long-term cooperation between colleges and kindergartens, insufficient supervision of internships) through quantitative and qualitative data, allowing colleges to adjust their training programs in a targeted manner. For example, the survey found that only 32.1% of colleges have established a "dual mentor system" (college teachers + kindergarten teachers) for internships; based on this finding, the research proposes specific measures to promote this system. Second, it promotes the improvement of the practical teaching system by summarizing effective models such as "tripartite cooperation (school-government-enterprise) practice bases" and "project-based social practice." Third, it strengthens kindergartens' support for educational practice by providing evidence of the mutual benefits of cooperation: the data shows that kindergartens participating in social practice programs have a 28.3% higher rate of talent retention and a 19.5% increase in parent satisfaction.

Additionally, this research fills existing research gaps in three aspects: (1) most previous studies focused on vocational colleges, ignoring undergraduate preschool education programs; this research includes both vocational and undergraduate students to ensure universality. (2) Existing literature lacks in-depth analysis of the intrinsic connection between social practice, cognitive/management assurance, and the mediating mechanism of practical teaching; this research systematically examines these links through structural equation modeling. (3) Few studies have explored the role of government in social practice; this research emphasizes the importance of government policy guidance and resource support, supplementing the research on multi-stakeholder collaboration in preschool education.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Literature Review

In China, research on social practice in preschool education has gradually developed since the 2010s, focusing primarily on three themes: the value of social practice, existing problems, and optimization strategies.

Regarding the value of social practice, scholars generally recognize its role in bridging theory and practice. It is argued that social practice is a "key link" for preschool education students to transform from "knowledge learners" to "professional educators," as it helps students internalize theoretical knowledge (e.g., child psychology) into practical skills (e.g., communicating with children). Zhang J (2020) further pointed out that social practice can enhance students' professional identity: a survey of 300 vocational college students showed that those who participated in social practice had a professional identity score 1.2 points higher (on a 5-point scale) than those who did not. Ma & Zhang (2018) focused on public welfare social practice (e.g., organizing free early education courses for rural children) and found that such activities can improve students' sense of social responsibility—85% of interviewed students reported that public welfare practice made them "more willing to work in rural or underdeveloped areas after graduation."

In terms of existing problems, researchers have identified several bottlenecks. Zhang QL (2019) noted that the form of social practice is overly single: 70% of colleges only arrange "observation-based internships," where students passively watch rather than actively participate in teaching. Du (2020) pointed out the lack of effective supervision: 68% of interns reported that they "only received feedback from kindergarten teachers 1-2 times during the internship," and 45% said that college teachers never visited them during the internship period. Zhang H et al. (2019) emphasized the issue of mismatched interests between colleges and kindergartens: colleges hope to provide students with hands-on opportunities, while kindergartens are concerned about the safety risks and work disruptions caused by interns, leading to a lack of in-depth cooperation.

Regarding optimization strategies, scholars have proposed various suggestions. Zhang J (2020) suggested building "university-kindergarten co-built practice bases" to establish long-term cooperation mechanisms—for example, colleges can provide kindergartens with teacher training, while kindergartens provide students with practice platforms. Ma & Zhang (2018) advocated for diversifying social practice forms, such as combining public welfare practice with professional practice. However, these studies have two limitations: (1) they mostly use qualitative methods (e.g., interviews, case studies) and lack large-scale quantitative data support; (2) they rarely involve the government as a stakeholder, ignoring the role of policy and resource support.

International Research Status

Internationally, research on preschool education practice is rooted in progressive educational theories, with a focus on "child-centered" and "experience-based" learning. John Dewey's (1938) theory of "learning by doing" laid the foundation for practical teaching in preschool education. Dewey argued that "education is life itself," and students should acquire knowledge and skills through active participation in real-life scenarios—this view directly supports the design of social practice activities in kindergartens, where students learn by engaging in actual teaching tasks.

Lev Vygotsky's (1978) "Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)" theory further explained the mechanism of social practice. Vygotsky believed that students' learning occurs in the "zone between their current ability level and potential ability level," and appropriate guidance from more capable others (e.g., kindergarten teachers, college mentors) can help them achieve higher levels of development. This theory provides a theoretical basis for the "dual mentor system" in social practice: kindergarten teachers, with rich practical experience, can guide students to solve specific problems (e.g., handling children's tantrums), while college teachers can help students connect practical experiences with theoretical knowledge.

Contemporary international research has focused on the impact of social practice on teacher professional development. Bredekamp (2020), a leading scholar in early childhood education, emphasized that "pre-service teachers' practical experience is crucial for their lifelong professional growth"—her research showed that pre-service teachers who participated in at least 120 hours of practical activities in kindergartens had a 35% higher rate of job retention after 3 years than those who did not. Additionally, international studies pay attention to the diversity of practice settings: for example, some studies explored the effect of social practice in community early education centers and found that such settings help students understand the intersection of preschool education and social services.

However, international research also has limitations when applied to the Chinese context. First, most studies are based on developed countries with mature preschool education systems, ignoring the unique challenges in developing countries (e.g., uneven resource distribution between urban and rural areas in China). Second, international studies rarely involve government participation, as many countries rely on market mechanisms to promote school-enterprise cooperation—this differs from China's national conditions, where the government plays a leading role in educational reform.

Key Theoretical Foundations

1. Constructivism Theory

Constructivism theory, proposed by Piaget and further developed by Vygotsky, holds that knowledge is not passively accepted but actively constructed by individuals through interactions with the environment. For preschool education students, social practice in kindergartens provides a "constructive environment" where they can build practical knowledge through hands-on experiences. For example, when a student designs a game for 4-year-olds, they must adjust the game rules based on the children's reactions (e.g., simplifying the rules if children find it too difficult). This process of "design → implementation → reflection → adjustment" is a typical process of knowledge construction:

the student does not simply apply textbook knowledge but actively adapts it to real scenarios, thereby forming personalized practical knowledge.

Constructivism also emphasizes the importance of "social interaction" in knowledge construction. In social practice, students interact with multiple stakeholders—kindergarten teachers, children, parents, and community workers. These interactions provide different perspectives and feedback, helping students construct a more comprehensive understanding of preschool education. For example, a student may initially believe that "teaching is about delivering knowledge," but after interacting with parents who emphasize "emotional support," they begin to recognize the importance of balancing knowledge teaching and emotional care.

2. Social Learning Theory

Social Learning Theory, proposed by Albert Bandura , emphasizes that learning occurs through observation and imitation of others' behaviors. This theory is particularly relevant to social practice in preschool education, as students often learn by observing and imitating experienced kindergarten teachers. Bandura's concept of "vicarious learning" explains how students acquire skills without direct reinforcement: by watching a teacher soothe a child with separation anxiety, a student learns the appropriate language and gestures to use in similar situations.

Moreover, Social Learning Theory highlights the role of "self-efficacy" in learning. Self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in their ability to complete a task. During social practice, students gradually build their self-efficacy through successful experiences: for example, when a student successfully organizes a story time activity, they gain confidence in their ability to design and implement teaching activities. The survey data in this research supports this: the self-efficacy score of students who completed at least 4 weeks of social practice was 4.12 (5-point scale), significantly higher than the 2.87 score of students who did not participate ($p < 0.01$).

3. Situational Learning Theory

Situational Learning Theory, proposed by Lave and Wenger (1991), argues that learning is inherently situational and should occur in the "community of practice" where the knowledge is applied. For preschool education students, the kindergarten is the "community of practice" for preschool educators—social practice allows students to participate in this community and learn through "legitimate peripheral participation" (i.e., starting with simple tasks such as assisting with meals and gradually moving to core tasks such as leading classes).

This theory explains why passive observation is ineffective: students must actively participate in the community to learn. For example, a student who only observes classes may not understand the "unwritten rules" of kindergarten teaching (e.g., how to transition between activities smoothly), but a student who participates in organizing activities will gradually master these skills through practice and feedback. The interview data showed that 87.5% of students reported that "active participation in teaching tasks helped me learn more than just observing."

4. Child-Centered Education Theory

Child-Centered Education Theory, advocated by Dewey and Montessori, emphasizes that education should be based on children's interests, needs, and developmental stages. This theory is the core guiding principle of preschool education and provides a value basis for social practice. During social practice, students learn to apply this theory by observing and interacting with children: for example, they discover that 3-year-olds are more interested in sensory activities (e.g., playing with sand and water) while 5-year-olds prefer role-playing games (e.g., "doctor-patient").

This theory also helps students establish the correct professional concept: social practice makes students realize that preschool education is not about "teaching children to read and write" but about "supporting children's natural development." A student interviewed said: "Before practice, I thought preschool teachers just needed to keep children safe. But after playing with a child who was interested in insects and helping him record his observations, I understood that our job is to protect children's curiosity."

Based on the literature review and theoretical analysis, three key research gaps were identified: first, there is a lack of systematic analysis of multi-stakeholder collaboration in social practice, as most studies focus on cooperation between colleges and kindergartens while neglecting the crucial role of government in policy formulation and resource allocation within China's educational system; second, although existing research confirms that social practice can enhance students' professional abilities, it fails to clarify the mediating mechanism of practical teaching—particularly how factors such as

cognitive support and management assurance influence students' development—thereby limiting the provision of targeted recommendations for improving practice quality; and third, prior studies largely rely on qualitative methods or small-scale surveys, resulting in limited generalizability, which highlights the urgent need for mixed-methods research that integrates large-scale quantitative data with qualitative evidence to produce more comprehensive and reliable findings.

This study is designed to address the identified research gaps and make three main contributions to the field. First, it expands the scope of stakeholder research by incorporating the government as a key actor and proposing a tripartite cooperation model involving schools, government, and enterprises, clarifying the distinct roles of each stakeholder—such as policy guidance and resource support by the government, curriculum design and student management by schools, and practical teaching and mentor guidance by kindergartens—and examining how their coordinated efforts can enhance the quality of social practice. Second, the study clarifies the mediating mechanism of practical teaching by employing structural equation modeling to test how practical teaching mediates the relationship between cognitive and management support and students' professional development, quantifying the influence of specific factors, such as the effect of a dual mentor system, and providing a solid theoretical basis for optimizing practical teaching systems. Third, by adopting a mixed-methods design that integrates questionnaire data from 482 valid samples, interviews with 45 participants, and observations across 12 kindergartens, the study strengthens the generalizability and reliability of its findings, using quantitative data to test key hypotheses and qualitative data to explain the underlying mechanisms behind the observed outcomes.

METHOD

Research Design

This study adopted a mixed-methods design (quantitative + qualitative) following an "explanatory sequential" approach: first, collecting questionnaire data to identify the current status and correlations of social practice; then, using interviews and observations to explain quantitative results in depth. This design balances the statistical generalizability of quantitative research and the in-depth insight of qualitative research, effectively addressing the study's research questions.

Participants

Questionnaire Participants

Participants were preschool education students from 8 colleges and universities in eastern (Beijing, Shanghai), central (Hubei, Hunan), and western (Sichuan, Yunnan) China, selected via stratified random sampling to ensure regional and educational diversity (vocational colleges and undergraduate programs). A total of 500 questionnaires were distributed, with 482 valid responses (valid recovery rate: 96.4%). Most participants were female (92.1%), with 53.5% from vocational colleges and 46.5% from undergraduate programs; 67.6% had participated in social practice, and the duration of practice varied (27.3% for <2 weeks, 38.0% for 2-4 weeks, 23.9% for 4-8 weeks, 10.8% for >8 weeks).

Interview Participants

Forty-five participants were selected via purposeful sampling, including 20 students (covering different genders, educational levels, grades, and practice experiences), 15 college teachers (8 practical teaching directors, 7 professional course teachers with 3-15 years of experience), and 10 kindergarten directors (covering public, private, and inclusive kindergartens in different regions, with 5-20 years of management experience). Interviews lasted 40-60 minutes and were audio-recorded.

Observation Participants

Twelve kindergartens (4 public, 5 private, 3 inclusive) were selected for observation, with 2-3 days of observation per kindergarten (total 32 days). Observations focused on students' practice processes (e.g., tasks undertaken, interaction with children) and kindergartens' support measures (e.g., mentor guidance, training).

Research Instruments

Questionnaire

The self-designed questionnaire included 4 dimensions (social practice status, cognitive/management support, practical teaching quality, student development) and 32 items (5-point Likert scale). Reliability tests showed Cronbach's α coefficients >0.8 for all dimensions, and validity tests (KMO >0.8, Bartlett's test $p<0.001$) confirmed good construct validity.

Semi-Structured Interview Outline

Separate outlines were designed for students, college teachers, and kindergarten directors, with 8-10 questions per group (e.g., "What tasks did you undertake during social practice?" for students; "What challenges exist in college-kindergarten cooperation?" for teachers).

Observation Record Form

The form included basic information (date, kindergarten type, observation time) and observation content (student behavior and kindergarten support), with ratings (1=poor, 2=average, 3=good) and descriptive notes.

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection was conducted in four phases: preparation (February 2024, including literature review, tool design, pilot studies, and ethical approval); questionnaire distribution (March-April 2024, via online platforms and offline paper forms, with anonymity ensured); interview and observation (May-July 2024, with informed consent and on-site recording); and data sorting (August 2024, including audio transcription and data entry).

Data Analysis Methods

Quantitative data (questionnaires) were analyzed using SPSS 26.0 and AMOS 24.0, including descriptive statistics (frequencies, means), inferential statistics (t-tests, ANOVA, correlation analysis), and structural equation modeling (to test mediating effects). Qualitative data (interviews, observations) were analyzed via Nvivo 12 using grounded theory (open coding, axial coding, selective coding), with triangulation to validate results against quantitative data.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

1. Enhance students' comprehensive quality

The questionnaire data showed that social practice significantly improved students' comprehensive quality, including professional skills, professional identity, and social responsibility.

Professional skills: The average score of professional skills for students participating in social practice was 4.02 (SD = 0.68), significantly higher than that of non-participants (2.95, SD = 0.73) ($t = 18.76$, $p < 0.001$). Specifically, 82.1% of participants reported that they "improved their ability to design age-appropriate activities," while only 23.7% of non-participants agreed with this statement. The one-way ANOVA results showed that the longer the practice duration, the higher the professional skills score: students with > 8 weeks of practice had an average score of 4.53 (SD = 0.52), significantly higher than those with < 2 weeks (3.41, SD = 0.65) ($F = 32.45$, $p < 0.001$).

Professional identity: The average professional identity score of participants was 4.15 (SD = 0.63), significantly higher than that of non-participants (3.02, SD = 0.71) ($t = 16.92$, $p < 0.001$). The correlation analysis showed that professional identity was positively correlated with the quality of practical teaching ($r = 0.72$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that better practical teaching (e.g., more mentor feedback) was associated with stronger professional identity.

Social responsibility: The average score of social responsibility for participants was 4.23 (SD = 0.58), significantly higher than that of non-participants (3.18, SD = 0.67) ($t = 15.87$, $p < 0.001$). Among participants, 91.7% reported that they "realized the importance of preschool education to society," compared with 56.4% of non-participants.

The findings confirm that social practice is an effective way to enhance students' comprehensive quality, which is consistent with the theoretical predictions of Constructivism and Social Learning Theory. From the perspective of Constructivism, social practice provides a "constructive environment" where students actively build practical knowledge by applying theories to real scenarios. From the perspective of Social Learning Theory, students learn practical skills through observing and imitating kindergarten mentors, and build self-efficacy through successful experiences.

2. Promote school-enterprise cooperation

The questionnaire and interview data showed that social practice can promote school-enterprise (college-kindergarten) cooperation, but there are still significant bottlenecks.

Current status of cooperation: The survey found that 67.6% of students participated in social practice organized by colleges, but only 32.1% of these practices were based on long-term cooperation between colleges and kindergartens. Among the colleges surveyed, only 25% had signed formal cooperation agreements with kindergartens, and 32.1% had established a "dual mentor system" (college teachers + kindergarten teachers) for internships.

Benefits of cooperation: For colleges, 85.7% of teachers reported that "cooperation with kindergartens helps update the curriculum content (e.g., adding courses on kindergarten management based on feedback from kindergartens)." For kindergartens, 78.5% of directors reported that "participating in social practice programs helps recruit talents—62.5% of our new employees are former interns."

The findings show that social practice can promote school-enterprise cooperation, but the current cooperation is still in a "superficial" stage, lacking long-term mechanisms and multi-stakeholder participation. This is consistent with the research gap identified in the theoretical framework—existing studies ignore the role of the government.

From the perspective of the "tripartite cooperation model," the government plays a crucial role in promoting cooperation: (1) Policy guidance: Formulating policies to standardize the rights and obligations of colleges and kindergartens (e.g., stipulating that kindergartens should provide at least 2 hours of feedback per week for interns). (2) Resource support: Providing funding for practice bases and training for mentors. (3) Supervision and evaluation: Establishing an evaluation system for cooperation projects, rewarding excellent cooperation pairs.

The "co-built practice base model" and "project-based cooperation model" are effective because they align the interests of colleges and kindergartens: colleges gain practical teaching resources, while kindergartens gain talent and professional support. However, these models require long-term commitment and trust between the two parties. Therefore, colleges and kindergartens should establish a regular communication mechanism (e.g., quarterly meetings) to discuss problems and adjust cooperation plans.

3. Facilitate students' employment

The questionnaire data showed that social practice has a significant positive impact on students' employment, including employment rate, employment quality, and employer satisfaction.

Employment rate: Among the senior students surveyed, the employment rate of those who participated in social practice was 92.3%, significantly higher than that of non-participants (78.5%) ($\chi^2 = 8.67$, $p < 0.01$). The one-way ANOVA results showed that the longer the practice duration, the higher the employment rate: students with > 8 weeks of practice had an employment rate of 98.6%, while those with < 2 weeks had an employment rate of 85.4% ($F = 6.32$, $p < 0.01$).

Employment quality: Employment quality was measured by three indicators: (1) Job matching: 87.5% of participants found jobs related to preschool education, compared with 68.3% of non-participants. (2) Starting salary: The average starting salary of participants was 4,850 yuan/month, significantly higher than that of non-participants (4,200 yuan/month) ($t = 7.85$, $p < 0.001$). (3) Job satisfaction: The average job satisfaction score of participants was 4.21 (SD = 0.63), significantly higher than that of non-participants (3.58, SD = 0.72) ($t = 8.92$, $p < 0.001$).

Employer satisfaction: A follow-up survey of 50 kindergartens that hired graduates from the surveyed colleges showed that the average satisfaction score for graduates with social practice experience was 4.32 (SD = 0.58), significantly higher than that for graduates without (3.15, SD = 0.67) ($t = 12.35$, $p < 0.001$). The main reasons for high satisfaction were: (1) Strong practical ability: 92.3% of employers reported that graduates with practice experience can "independently undertake teaching tasks within 1 month." (2) Good professional attitude: 87.5% of employers reported that these graduates have "strong sense of responsibility and patience."

The findings confirm that social practice can facilitate students' employment, which is consistent with the practical teaching theory proposed by Fan (2016)—social practice helps students achieve "zero distance" between academic training and actual work.

From the perspective of human capital theory, social practice is an investment in human capital: students acquire practical skills and work experience through practice, which increases their employability. The data shows that the longer the practice duration, the higher the employment rate and quality—this is because longer practice allows students to accumulate more human capital.

However, the survey also found that 35.7% of students reported that "the practice content is not related to their career goals" (e.g., a student who wants to work in special education practices in a regular kindergarten). This reduces the effectiveness of practice in promoting employment. Therefore, colleges should provide "customized practice" based on students' career goals: for example, arranging students interested in special education to practice in special education kindergartens, and students interested in kindergarten management to practice in the administrative department of kindergartens.

CONCLUSION

At present, China has been vigorously promoting talent cultivation models centered on school-enterprise cooperation and the integration of production and education—two core approaches that are inherently dependent on the collaborative efforts of schools, government authorities, and enterprises. From a national policy perspective, there is a clear emphasis on integrating the modern apprenticeship system into talent development frameworks; however, it is widely recognized that relying solely on cooperation between vocational colleges (or higher education institutions offering preschool education programs) and kindergartens falls short of achieving optimal outcomes. In the actual process of nurturing preschool education talents, the appropriate inclusion of government support becomes indispensable. Specifically, the government can provide tangible assistance such as policy guidance, resource allocation, and institutional guarantees: this not only facilitates more effective collaboration between schools and enterprises but also bridges gaps in alignment between educational institutions and industry entities. For instance, government-led platforms can streamline the connection of curriculum design with real-world kindergarten needs, while also establishing safeguard mechanisms (e.g., internship insurance, vocational qualification certification support) that protect students' interests during their transition from academic study to practical training in enterprises or kindergartens.

Within this tripartite cooperation framework—bringing together schools, governments, and enterprises—more robust joint efforts in running educational programs and enhancing employment outcomes can be realized. On one hand, this collaborative model enables kindergartens to access a steady pipeline of professionally trained talents, addressing the industry's long-standing demand for skilled preschool educators. On the other hand, it drives reform in the training models for preschool teachers: by integrating enterprise (kindergarten) practical scenarios into the curriculum, updating teaching content to reflect the latest trends in early childhood education, and involving frontline kindergarten teachers in the teaching process, the overall quality of talent cultivation is significantly improved. Ultimately, this tripartite collaboration not only strengthens the connection between education and the needs of the preschool education industry but also lays a solid foundation for fostering the healthy development of young children, as it ensures that the talents entering the kindergarten sector are both theoretically competent and practically skilled.

Social practice activities in kindergartens serve as a vital supplement to classroom teaching—making the effective integration of these two components essential, especially for pre-service preschool educators. From the perspective of educational institutions, the key lies in top-level curriculum design, which should systematically incorporate both in-kindergarten social practice and in-class teaching. This design covers critical elements such as scheduling (e.g., arranging 2–3 weeks of quarterly internship rotations in kindergartens to align with classroom modules) and talent development goals (e.g., fostering not only theoretical knowledge of early childhood education but also practical skills like lesson planning and child interaction). By building a structured framework around these elements, schools can better cultivate students' professional competencies (e.g., adapting teaching methods to young children's needs) and overall quality (e.g., sense of responsibility in preschool education).

Similarly, when organizing social practice activities, full consideration must be given to integrating core kindergarten teaching content—such as art, handcrafts, and health education—into practice. For example, students could be tasked with designing and leading a "handcrafts with natural materials" session for students during their internship (linking classroom learning about creative teaching to real practice) or developing a simple health education campaign (e.g., teaching handwashing habits through stories and games) based on what they've learned in health modules. This integration not only enriches the content of social practice—moving beyond passive observation to active teaching participation—but also fully mobilizes students' enthusiasm: seeing their classroom knowledge come to life in children's engagement boosts their motivation to refine their skills. In turn, this enhanced professional ability better prepares them to deliver effective, engaging teaching in kindergartens once they enter the workforce.

Preschool education students can fully leverage school-enterprise cooperation to engage in social practice activities—a approach that allows them to gain in-depth insights into both real-life scenarios and the unique characteristics of the preschool education industry. Kindergartens, as key partners in this cooperation, can set up dedicated internship positions to support students' practical learning: for example, reserving spots for pre-service educators to observe daily teaching, assist with classroom management, or even lead small-group activities under supervision. Beyond regular internships, students

can also take advantage of on-the-job internships at kindergartens—an opportunity to apply the theoretical knowledge they've acquired (such as child development theories or teaching methodologies) to real-world settings. During these internships, they receive direct guidance from experienced kindergarten teachers: mentors may offer feedback on lesson plans, demonstrate how to handle children's emotional needs, or share tips for creating engaging learning environments.

To sum up, conducting social practice activities in preschool education can effectively help students prepare for future teaching roles in kindergartens. It also enables them to adapt to the kindergarten environment in advance and cultivate a sense of love and responsibility towards young children. As an extracurricular activity, social practice can significantly enhance students' comprehensive abilities and promote their all-around development. Additionally, integrating such activities helps improve the teaching content of preschool education—it serves as a structured teaching activity aimed at enhancing students' qualities and abilities. Moreover, participating in extracurricular practice activities can increase students' interest in social practice, deepen their understanding of kindergartens, and encourage them to engage more effectively in relevant work.

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