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Early Childhood Teacher Well-being in South Korea: Research Trends from Holistic Conceptual Framework

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Abstract

This study systematically analyzed research trends on the well-being of early childhood teachers in South Korea. A total of 396 academic articles published between 2008 and 2025 were collected using keywords such as early childhood teacher, well-being, happiness, and life satisfaction. Keyword network analysis, ego-network analysis, and topic modeling (LDA) were conducted using NetMiner 4.5. High-frequency keywords included job satisfaction, teaching efficacy, job stress, social support, and interaction. The keyword network analysis identified three clusters: (1) exploration of related factors, (2) programs for enhancing well-being, and (3) childcare practices emphasizing children's rights. These results suggest that research has mainly focused on individual and organizational factors, while also extending to practical interventions and relational contexts involving children. Topic modeling revealed twelve topics, with key themes including psychological burnout and emotional labor, teacher professionalism and emotional sensitivity, leadership and organizational relationships, and teachers' positive psychological resources. When compared with the Holistic Conceptual Framework (Jeon et al., 2025), Korean studies primarily focused on emotional and occupational well-being, with a significant lack of research on physical well-being. Additionally, these studies placed greater emphasis on relational harmony and organizational commitment—particularly relationships with children, colleagues, and directors—rather than on individual health behaviors or systemic supports. This study calls for a transition toward integrative approaches that reflect the multidimensional nature of well-being. By reframing the discourse on Korean teacher well-being within an international context, it highlights the need for balanced policies and practical supports to enhance teachers' quality of life and advance early childhood education research.

Keywords: Keyword Network; Ego-Network; Topic Modeling; Wellness; Happiness