

# **PATHS TO IMPROVE KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS' REFLECTIVE COMPETENCE FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

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**Abstract:** Reflective competence is the core fulcrum of kindergarten teachers' professional development. Constructing scientific and systematic paths to improve reflective competence is a key measure to promote teachers' transformation from "practical" to "reflective" and "expert" practitioners. Currently, kindergarten teachers in China face prominent problems in reflective practice, such as cognitive biases, fragmented content, single methods, and weak support systems. The essence lies in the misalignment between reflective practice and professional development needs, which not only restricts the advancement of reflective competence but also traps professional development in a predicament of "experience solidification". Based on reflective practice theory, sociocultural theory, and teacher professional development stage theory, this study focuses on the core orientation of professional development and constructs a closed-loop path for improving reflective competence: concept guidance - content reconstruction - method innovation - system guarantee - support empowerment. It also supports hierarchical adaptation strategies for novice, proficient, and expert teachers, providing an operable practical framework for kindergarten teachers' professional growth and theoretical/practical references for teacher team building in preschool education.

**Keywords:** Kindergarten teachers; Reflective competence; Professional development; Improvement paths

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

With the in-depth implementation of the 14th Five-Year Plan for the Development and Improvement of Preschool Education, China's preschool education has fully entered a critical stage from "scale expansion" to "quality improvement". A high-quality and professional teacher team is the core support for improving the quality of care and education. Reflective competence is the endogenous driving force for teachers' professional development and a bridge connecting educational theory and practice. Teachers lacking systematic reflection can hardly achieve the leap from experience-based to professional practitioners. Currently, some teachers have long remained at the level of mechanical repetition in teaching, and weak reflective competence has become a core bottleneck restricting the overall quality of the teacher team, highlighting the practical necessity of constructing systematic paths to improve reflective competence. Existing studies have emphasized the importance of improving teachers' professional competence by analyzing the essence of teacher professionalism, reflected on the teacher loss problem caused by recent teacher education reforms, and called for attention to teacher education. The Professional Standards for Kindergarten Teachers (Trial) lists reflection and development as one of the seven core areas of teachers' professional competence, clearly requiring teachers to "actively collect and analyze relevant information, continuously reflect, and improve care and education work" and "formulate professional development plans, actively participate in professional training, and continuously improve their professional quality". The Professional Standards for Kindergarten Teachers (Trial) (hereinafter referred to as the Professional Standards) answers the questions of "why", "what", and "how" from three major aspects: basic concepts, basic content, and implementation suggestions. The basic concepts include four aspects: "child-centered", "morality-oriented", "competence-focused", and "lifelong learning", which fundamentally guide the direction of kindergarten teachers' professional development. Meanwhile, they are the conceptual cornerstone necessary for kindergarten teachers to understand and practice this professional standard and complete their own professional construction. At the same time, this document clearly states that kindergarten teachers should possess reflective competence: "to actively collect and analyze relevant information, continuously reflect, and improve care and education work". As an indirect form of cognition, reflection is more profound and dialectical, serving as a bridge to grasp the essence. The level of kindergarten teachers' reflection not only affects the effective development of kindergarten activities but also has an important impact on children's development and teachers' professional growth. The Guidelines for Evaluating the Quality of Kindergarten Care and Education issued in 2022 further incorporates teachers' continuous reflection and professional growth into the evaluation system, emphasizing that reflection results should be transformed into specific actions to improve care and education, and taking the systematicness and depth of reflective practice as one of the core indicators for kindergarten quality evaluation. This document clarifies the core position of reflective competence in teachers' professional development and provides a policy basis for path construction: path design must closely focus on professional development goals, balance the dual needs of improving care and education practice and enhancing teachers' literacy, and not only meet the rigid requirements of policies but also fit the actual scenarios of kindergartens.

Existing studies have mentioned the advantageous characteristics of reflective teachers. Reflective teachers are both practitioners of teaching and researchers of teaching actions. Compared with traditional teachers, reflective teachers always reform and improve teaching concepts, methods, and content. In practice, reflective teachers hold open educational views and child views, assume diverse teacher roles, can establish pluralistic cooperative and dialogical relationships, and regularly reflect on and revise educational practices. Meanwhile, reflective teachers have rich knowledge and experience reserves, flexible skills and educational wisdom, keen insight and creativity. They base their reflection on practice, actively improve educational practice and their own literacy, and are teachers in dynamic growth[1].

In current practice, kindergarten teachers' reflection presents prominent characteristics of "valuing form over effect", "valuing individual over collaboration", and "valuing experience over theory", which are specifically manifested in four aspects: biased reflection positioning, imbalanced reflection content, single reflection method, and lack of support and guarantee[2]. These not only restrict the optimization of care and education quality but also hinder teachers' transformation from experience-based to professional and expert practitioners, which urgently need to be addressed through the construction of systematic paths. However, existing studies still have deficiencies in research perspective, stage adaptability, and practical transformation. Firstly, the research perspective is fragmented, focusing more on single improvement strategies (such as writing reflective journals and optimizing teaching and research activities) and less on multi-dimensional path construction[3]; secondly, the stage adaptability is insufficient, lacking hierarchical design for novice-proficient-expert teachers and failing to fully consider the differences in reflective needs of teachers at different professional development stages; thirdly, the practical transformation is weak, with more theoretical discussions and insufficient research on systematic and operable paths combined with the actual scenarios of kindergartens. Existing paths mostly focus on a single dimension or subject, failing to form a closed-loop system of "concept - content - method - system - support".

Based on this, this study focuses on the orientation of professional development and the core of constructing systematic paths, attempting to solve the core problem of how to make reflective competence truly become the endogenous driving force for teachers' professional development through hierarchical and closed-loop path design.

## **2 PRACTICAL DILEMMAS IN IMPROVING KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS' REFLECTIVE COMPETENCE**

### **2.1 Cognitive Dilemma: Disconnection Between Reflection Positioning and Professional Development Goals**

#### **2.1.1 Bias in cognition of reflective value**

Some teachers equate reflection with post-event summary and error correction, lacking the core cognition that reflection is professional growth. They believe the purpose of reflection is to complete teaching and research tasks and improve teaching methods, while few teachers can truly recognize the comprehensive value of reflection in updating educational concepts, optimizing professional knowledge, and enhancing professional skills. This cognitive bias<sup>[16]</sup> leads teachers to focus on superficial behavioral adjustments rather than in-depth professional literacy advancement in reflection, resulting in insufficient consideration of their own professional shortcomings in game support capabilities.

#### **2.1.2 Weakened connection with professional development**

Most teachers have not established a logical connection between reflection and professional development, regarding them as two independent categories. Novice teachers generally focus on whether the teaching process is compliant and whether children are obedient in reflection, while ignoring content such as whether their professional knowledge is suitable for children's needs and whether educational concepts meet the requirements of the Professional Standards; proficient teachers can pay attention to teaching effects, but lack accurate identification of professional shortcomings and targeted improvements, leading to reflection failing to become the endogenous driving force for professional development.

#### **2.1.3 Lack of critical reflection**

Some teachers have a tendency to worship experience, lacking critical examination of their own educational behaviors and concepts. They often avoid problems and glorify practices in reflection, and few teachers can take the initiative to question the rationality of their own educational behaviors. Their reflections are mostly affirmative descriptions with little critical reflection, making it difficult to achieve the renewal of educational concepts and the breakthrough of professional capabilities through reflection.

### **2.2 Content Dilemma: Misalignment Between Reflection Dimensions and Professional Development Needs**

#### **2.2.1 Fragmented content and lack of systematicness**

Teachers' reflection mostly focuses on single teaching events or specific problems, failing to form a structured framework corresponding to professional development dimensions. Most of the content of teachers' reflection is scattered memories of teaching fragments, and few teachers can conduct systematic reflection around professional concepts, professional knowledge, and professional capabilities. In activity reflection, teachers mostly pay attention to materials and children's participation, while ignoring core dimensions directly related to professional development such as the fit between activity design and children's development goals and their own support capabilities; in the reflection on daily life organization, teachers mostly focus on the smoothness of link connection, while ignoring the penetration of core experiences of children and the improvement of their own integrated care and education capabilities in daily life.

### **2.2.2 Imbalanced dimensions and lack of development orientation**

The content of teachers' reflection presents three imbalanced tendencies: first, valuing self over children, with a large proportion of their own teaching behaviors and a small proportion of children's development needs in teachers' reflection, lacking targeted reflection on children's learning characteristics and developmental differences; second, valuing technology over concepts, focusing on the adjustment of teaching skills rather than the optimization of educational concepts. For example, a teacher only paid attention to the diversity of questioning methods in the reflection on a language activity, but failed to reflect on whether the child-centered concept was effectively practiced and whether children's right to expression was respected; third, valuing practice over learning, ignoring the professional knowledge gaps and insufficient capabilities exposed in the reflection process .

### **2.2.3 Insufficient depth and lack of theoretical support**

Most teachers' reflections only stay at the descriptive level, making it difficult to conduct in-depth analysis and interpretation combined with professional theories. Teachers usually make descriptive records of phenomena in reflection, but ignore the theoretical causes of behaviors and solutions. Few teachers can cite relevant policy documents or educational and psychological theories as the basis for reflection, leading to difficulties in transforming reflection from experience to professional knowledge .

## **2.3 Methodological Dilemma: Mismatch Between Reflection Tools and Professional Advancement Needs**

### **2.3.1 Unstructured individual reflection methods**

In the reflection process, teachers are usually in a state of "loss for words", and reflection methods lack systematic and structured guidance . Existing individual reflections mostly rely on unstructured methods such as memory and scattered records, lacking systematic tool support. Teachers' reflections are mostly chronological descriptions, failing to form a fixed thinking framework. When novice teachers use unstructured methods, the logic and pertinence of their reflections are particularly insufficient, making it difficult to accurately identify professional development shortcomings. Even if some teachers try to use reflective journals, most lack core modules such as theoretical support and improvement plans, and the content is often simple records like "organized an art activity today, and the children were very happy", without in-depth thinking related to professional growth.

### **2.3.2 Formalization of collective reflection**

Traditional collective reflection is mostly carried out in the form of teaching and research meetings, with serious formalization problems such as imbalance in discourse power and vague discussions . In most collective reflections, backbone teachers and teaching and research leaders speak more, while novice teachers lack the opportunity to express themselves; discussions often focus on superficial issues such as activity processes and materials, rather than core issues such as the improvement of professional capabilities. In addition, collective reflection lacks standardized processes and tools, leading to difficulties in in-depth discussions and the formation of professional consensus and effective improvement strategies.

### **2.3.3 Insufficient linkage between reflection and practice**

Existing reflections are mostly post-action reflections, lacking the immediacy and pertinence of in-action reflection . Reflective practice theory emphasizes the two-way interaction between in-action reflection and post-action reflection, but kindergarten teachers in China mostly focus on review in reflection, lacking the ability of rapid reflection and adjustment to immediate problems in the teaching process. In teacher-child interaction, teachers often find it difficult to reflect on the appropriateness of their own response methods in a timely manner, missing the immediate opportunity to optimize educational behaviors and improve professional capabilities. In game activities, there is a lack of in-action reflection on children's sudden interests, making it difficult to flexibly adjust game plans, which not only restricts the realization of the educational value of games but also affects the improvement of their own game support capabilities.

## **2.4 Support Dilemma: Mismatch Between Guarantee System and Path Implementation Needs**

### **2.4.1 Insufficient time and energy guarantee**

Kindergarten teachers have a heavy workload and generally lack dedicated reflection time[4]. Teachers work long hours, mostly on care and education work and administrative affairs, and have little time to invest in reflection and professional learning. Most teachers report that they "do not have enough energy for in-depth reflection", and "lack of time" is listed as a major obstacle to reflection. In addition, some kindergartens have a orientation of "valuing teaching over reflection" and have not incorporated reflection into the daily work process, further squeezing the already limited reflection time.

### **2.4.2 Lack of system guarantee**

Reflection requires institutionalized guarantee, but in reality, there is a lack of systematic reflection evaluation mechanisms. Most kindergartens have not established regular systems related to reflection, leading to insufficient motivation for teachers . . Few kindergartens have formulated reflection management systems and reflection evaluation mechanisms, and rarely link reflection performance with teacher assessment and professional title evaluation. The lack of systems results in reflection lacking clear requirements and incentive mechanisms, and teachers' reflection mostly relies on personal consciousness, making it difficult to sustain. At the same time, teacher reflection evaluation is mostly qualitative description, lacking quantitative standards and personalized feedback, making it difficult to effectively guide teachers to improve[5].

### **2.4.3 Weak resource support**

Existing studies have pointed out through case analysis that teachers lack targeted reflection tools and expert guidance, making it difficult to transform observations into effective improvement strategies. The problem of weak resource support is also prominent. Firstly, insufficient training resources: more than half of kindergartens carry out fewer than one special reflection training per semester, and the training content is mostly theoretical explanation, lacking practical operability; secondly, uneven expert support: teachers in private kindergartens and rural kindergartens receive less than one expert reflection guidance per academic year on average, far lower than those in public kindergartens and urban kindergartens[6,7]; thirdly, lack of platform resources: few kindergartens have built online reflection exchange platforms, making it difficult for teachers to share excellent reflection cases and professional development resources; fourthly, lack of tool resources: most kindergartens do not provide structured reflection tools, and teachers lack a unified reflection framework and templates.

### **2.4.4 Insufficient social support**

Insufficient social support also restricts the improvement of teachers' reflective competence to a certain extent. The low social status and salary of kindergarten teachers affect their endogenous motivation for reflection and professional development. In addition, there is a cognitive bias towards the kindergarten teacher profession in society, and the label of "nanny" leads to insufficient professional sense of achievement among teachers, further inhibiting their enthusiasm for improving reflective competence.

## **3 CONSTRUCTION OF PATHS TO IMPROVE KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS' REFLECTIVE COMPETENCE FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

Based on the systematic analysis of practical dilemmas above, combined with the core viewpoints of reflective practice theory, teacher professional development stage theory, and sociocultural theory, and following the five principles of goal orientation, practice adaptation, systematicness, hierarchical adaptation, and cultural fit, this study constructs a closed-loop improvement path of "concept guidance - content reconstruction - method innovation - system guarantee - support empowerment", ensuring that the improvement of reflective competence is deeply bound to professional development. In the practical scenario of teacher development schools, reflection can be truly transformed into an effective way for teachers' professional growth through specific methods such as reflecting on past educational events, reviewing teaching processes, and conducting collective reflection[8].

In the late 1980s, Schön's reflective practice theory proposed that reflection in professional practice includes two levels: "reflection-in-action" and "reflection-on-action": "reflection-in-action" refers to the immediate adjustment of behavioral strategies during practice, and "reflection-on-action" refers to the retrospective analysis and summary of the practice process. Therefore, the design of teachers' reflection paths should take into account both immediate reflection and in-depth reflection, providing teachers with both in-action reflection tools and post-action reflection platforms to ensure that reflection runs through the entire process of care and education practice.

### **3.1 Anchoring the Positioning of Reflective Concepts for Professional Development**

Centering on the core requirements of the Professional Standards for Kindergarten Teachers (Trial) and the Guidelines for Evaluating the Quality of Kindergarten Care and Education, design special training on reflection and professional development, and help teachers clarify that the core goal of reflection is to promote professional growth through multiple forms such as policy interpretation, expert lectures, and case analysis. For example, invite preschool education experts to deeply interpret the relevant requirements in the field of reflection and development, and intuitively show the logical chain of reflection - professional advancement through typical cases of expert teachers achieving professional leap through continuous reflection, reversing the cognitive bias that reflection is a task. Concept penetration should avoid dogmatic and cramming training, and let teachers truly feel the value of reflection through case empathy.

Construct a reflection case library for "novice-proficient-expert teachers", select typical reflection cases of teachers at different professional development stages, and conduct comparative analysis of the correlation between their reflection dimensions, depth, and professional growth. For example, show the advancement cases of novice teachers from technical-level reflection to situational-level reflection, and cases of expert teachers updating educational concepts through dialectical-level reflection; at the same time, collect excellent reflection cases published in core journals to provide teachers with professional reflection perspectives and method references. Organize "reflection salons" to encourage teachers to share their own stories of reflection and professional growth, strengthening the internal cognition that "reflection is professional growth".

Guide teachers to formulate personalized reflection goals combined with their own professional development stages. In the late 1960s, Fuller from the University of Texas at Austin was one of the earliest researchers on teacher professional development stages. He took the changes of things concerned by teachers in their growth as the research object, adopted the form of questionnaire survey, and creatively proposed the pre-service teacher professional development stage theory according to the differences in core issues or main contents concerned by teachers in different periods. He believed that the professional development of pre-service teachers should go through "pre-teaching concerns stage, early concerns about survival stage, teaching situational concerns stage, and concerns about pupils stage". In view of the dynamics of teacher professional development and the ambiguity of stage division, novice teachers (0-3 years of teaching experience) can focus on technical-level reflection, with the goal of mastering basic reflection methods and identifying

superficial problems in teaching; proficient teachers (4-10 years of teaching experience) can focus on situational-level reflection, focusing on analyzing complex educational situations combined with theories and optimizing care and education behaviors; expert teachers (more than 10 years of teaching experience) can focus on dialectical-level reflection, committed to critically examining educational concepts and practices and promoting educational innovation. Through clear goal setting, teachers can clarify the reflection focus at different stages, enhancing the pertinence and endogenous motivation of reflection. At the same time, guide teachers to formulate "reflection - professional development" action plans, closely linking reflection goals with professional growth goals[9,10].

### 3.2 Constructing a Reflection Content System Oriented to Professional Development

Taking the Professional Standards for Kindergarten Teachers as the fundamental basis, reconstruct the reflection content framework, realize the accurate connection between reflection content and professional development dimensions, and form a four-dimensional integrated reflection content system. Four-Dimensional Integrated Reflection Content System is shown in Table 1.

**Table 1** Four-Dimensional Integrated Reflection Content System

Professional Development Dimensions	Core Reflection Modules	Examples of Specific Reflection Content
Professional Concepts and Ethics	Reflection on child views, educational views, and ethical behaviors	Whether educational behaviors conform to the "child-centered" concept; whether to respect children's personality and individual differences; whether to treat every child fairly and impartially; whether ethical behaviors meet professional norms
Professional Knowledge	Reflection on domain knowledge, developmental knowledge, and educational knowledge	Whether care and education content is in line with children's age characteristics and developmental needs; whether to use relevant guidelines to guide practice; whether there are obvious gaps in professional knowledge (such as scientific domain knowledge, game theory knowledge)
Professional Capabilities	Reflection on care and education implementation, teacher-child interaction, environment creation, and cooperation and communication capabilities	Appropriateness of behaviors such as game support and daily life organization; effectiveness of incentive evaluation, communication, and cooperation; whether to respond to children's needs in a timely manner; whether environment creation supports children's independent inquiry
Lifelong Learning	Reflection on professional shortcomings, learning needs, and growth plans	Own professional shortcomings and developmental needs; knowledge gaps and insufficient capabilities exposed in reflection; whether to formulate reasonable professional development plans; whether to take the initiative to participate in professional learning

On this basis, design special reflection content for different care and education scenarios: in terms of game activity reflection, focus on the appropriateness of game design, the professionalism of game support capabilities, and the ability to interpret children's game behaviors, such as whether game goals are in line with children's developmental levels, whether to effectively support children's in-depth learning, and whether the handling of children's game conflicts is scientific; in terms of daily life reflection, focus on the effectiveness of integrated care and education, the cultivation of children's self-care abilities, and the penetration of core experiences in daily life, such as whether life links contain educational value and whether attention is paid to the development of children's good habits; in terms of educational activity reflection, focus on the achievement of activity goals, the appropriateness of teaching methods, and the stimulation of children's learning interests, such as whether activity design is in line with children's cognitive characteristics and whether interactive teaching methods are effectively used; in terms of teacher-child interaction reflection, focus on the professionalism of interaction methods, the quality of response to children's needs, and the degree of realization of equal dialogue, such as whether responses to children's questions are inspiring and whether attention is paid to children's emotional needs.

### 3.3 Creating Reflection Methods and Tools Adapted to Professional Advancement

The core of reflection method innovation is to make tools truly serve professional growth rather than being a mere formality. At the individual reflection level, in reflective journals, guide teachers to shift from simple phenomenon recording to in-depth analysis and self-improvement through a complete chain of practice description, problem identification, theoretical support, improvement plans, and professional growth gains. For example, a teacher observed that children's participation in the science area was not high, and then realized that their own scientific domain knowledge reserve was insufficient and the form of material placement was single. Combining relevant theories of children's scientific inquiry, he formulated a specific plan to supplement professional knowledge and enrich material types, and finally achieved steady improvement in scientific education capabilities - such reflection truly realized the connection between experience and professionalism.

At the same time, reflective mind maps can be introduced, taking the core dimensions of professional development as fulcrums to sort out the internal connection between reflection logic and ability improvement. If game support

capability is taken as the core, branches such as game design, material placement, interactive guidance, and problem-solving can be extended, with specific reflection points and advancement directions marked under each branch, making scattered thinking systematic and orderly. For typical educational scenarios such as children's conflicts and question responses, situational reflection cards can also be developed, condensing key information such as situational description, core issues, theoretical basis, and improvement strategies, to facilitate teachers to carry out immediate reflection quickly during work breaks.

Collective reflection needs to break the predicament of imbalanced discourse power and vague discussions, and build a truly democratic and efficient communication atmosphere. We may try the three-step collaborative reflection: first, teachers share specific educational scenarios and preliminary thinking; then, use multi-perspective analysis methods to conduct in-depth discussions from different dimensions such as fact description and innovative suggestions; finally, jointly refine targeted improvement strategies and professional growth points. To ensure that every teacher's voice can be heard, the small note method can be adopted, allowing teachers to submit puzzles and problems anonymously, which are sorted out uniformly before centralized discussion, avoiding the situation where backbone teachers dominate the discourse power. The 360° feedback reflection method is also worthy of promotion. Teachers collect multi-dimensional feedback from peers, managers, and parents around specific educational practices, and comprehensively identify professional shortcomings combined with self-reflection, making the improvement direction more targeted.

The in-depth linkage between practice and reflection requires the construction of a full-process reflection closed loop. On the one hand, establish a complete model of pre-reflection - in-reflection - post-reflection: pre-class pre-reflection focuses on professional development goals and clarifies the reflection focus in activity design; in-class in-reflection emphasizes immediate adjustment and optimizes teaching behaviors according to the actual situation of teacher-child interaction; post-class reflection precipitates experience and refines laws combined with professional development dimensions. On the other hand, implement an iterative mechanism of reflection - practice - re-reflection, transforming reflection results into specific professional development action plans. If reflection finds that one's own game support capability is insufficient, an advancement path can be formulated: observing and learning excellent cases, simulating and practicing key links, and continuously optimizing combined with feedback, testing the improvement effect in practice, and constantly improving strategies through re-reflection, forming a spiral upward growth cycle.

### **3.4 Establishing a Long-Term Guarantee Mechanism for Path Implementation**

The continuous improvement of reflective competence is inseparable from the support of regular systems. Reflection should be formally incorporated into the daily work process of teachers, and reflection requirements at different levels should be clarified. For example, conduct simple reflection after activities, focusing on immediate problems; carry out thematic reflection every week to discuss core puzzles in depth; form in-depth reflection reports every month to systematically sort out the trajectory of professional growth. A reflection workday can also be set up to temporarily reduce the interference of non-care and education administrative affairs, providing teachers with time and space for focused thinking. At the same time, establish a reflection portfolio system to collect teachers' reflective journals, reports, case analyses, action plans, and other materials, comprehensively recording the entire process of reflective competence and professional growth, and providing a true and reliable basis for teacher evaluation and development.

The deep binding of professional development and reflection requires improving the linkage mechanism. Reflective competence can be incorporated into the teacher evaluation system, formulating quantitative indicators covering the systematicness and depth of reflection and the correlation with professional development. The evaluation results are linked to professional title evaluation, selection of excellent teachers, and salary adjustment, making reflection truly an important measure of professional growth. It is also particularly important to establish a mechanism for transforming reflection results, encouraging teachers to transform high-quality reflection cases and research experiences into papers and curriculum resources, and rewarding teachers who have achieved results to stimulate the endogenous motivation for active reflection. In addition, implement a linkage model of reflection and training, and customize personalized training programs according to the common and individual shortcomings exposed in teachers' reflection - strengthen special learning of educational theories if there is insufficient theoretical support, and carry out special skill training if game support capability is weak, making training truly targeted.

Optimizing the reflection evaluation and feedback system is crucial for its diversity, accuracy, and timeliness. Construct a multi-evaluation system including self-evaluation, peer evaluation, manager evaluation, expert evaluation, and parent evaluation. The evaluation focus is on the accuracy of identifying professional shortcomings, the feasibility of improvement plans, and the effectiveness of professional growth, avoiding the one-sidedness of single evaluation. A personalized feedback mechanism is indispensable. The evaluation results should be specifically informed to teachers through feedback interviews and written suggestions, rather than simple scores or grades, clearly pointing out the highlights and deficiencies in reflection. At the same time, implement an iterative mechanism for reflection evaluation, summarize and analyze the evaluation results every semester, and optimize the evaluation indicators and methods according to practical conditions, so that the evaluation system always maintains scientificity and pertinence.

### **3.5 Improving the Support System for Path Implementation**

In terms of organizational support, build a multi-collaborative reflection ecology. A good reflection ecology requires the collaborative participation of multiple subjects. A 1+N reflective professional learning community can be constructed,

led by high-quality public kindergartens, linking with surrounding private kindergartens, rural kindergartens, and other types of kindergartens to carry out collaborative reflection activities. Through a closed-loop process of collective lesson preparation, observation practice, joint reflection, and improvement and optimization, promote the collaborative improvement of reflective competence of teachers at different levels. Establish a three-level leadership mechanism of principal - teaching and research group leader - backbone teacher: the principal is responsible for the overall reflection culture construction and system design; the teaching and research group leader takes the lead in formulating specific reflection plans and activity schemes; the backbone teacher serves as a reflection mentor to provide one-on-one precise guidance to novice teachers to accelerate their growth. More importantly, create a democratic and open reflection culture, encouraging teachers to boldly question and frankly share puzzles, making reflection a normal process of professional growth rather than a tool for criticism and accusation, and eliminating teachers' psychological concerns.

In terms of resource support, build an all-round reflection service platform. The core of resource support is to provide teachers with accessible and practical learning and practice tools. Construct an integrated online + offline training system: offline, carry out special training covering reflection theories, the use of structured tools, and case analysis relying on university preschool education majors and teacher development centers; online, build a reflection resource sharing platform, integrating excellent reflection cases, expert lecture videos, policy interpretation texts, and other resources to facilitate teachers to access, learn, and exchange at any time. Provide personalized reflection toolkits for different care and education scenarios, design special templates such as game activity reflection scales and teacher-child interaction reflection records, which uniformly include core modules such as practice description, problem identification, theoretical support, improvement plans, and professional growth, reducing the threshold for teachers' reflection. Strengthen expert leadership support, establish a tripartite cooperation mechanism of university experts - researchers - kindergarten teachers. Experts regularly enter kindergartens to help teachers break through reflection bottlenecks and improve the depth and professionalism of reflection through special lectures, case consultations, action research, and other forms.

In terms of rights and interests protection, provide basic support for reflection and professional development. Teachers' motivation for reflection is inseparable from solid rights and interests protection. Relevant policy requirements should be strictly implemented to reduce non-care and education administrative affairs to a certain extent, control the proportion of administrative work time within a reasonable range, ensure that teachers have collective reflection time every day, and allow teachers to have the energy to engage in in-depth thinking. Improve the salary and welfare and professional title evaluation system, take reflective competence and professional development achievements as core indicators for professional title evaluation, selection of excellent teachers, and salary adjustment, and establish a positive linkage of reflection performance - professional growth - incentive rewards. In particular, ensure that teachers in private kindergartens enjoy the same professional title evaluation treatment as those in public kindergartens, eliminating development obstacles caused by identity differences. At the same time, reverse the social cognitive bias of "nannyism" for kindergarten teachers through activities such as publicizing typical excellent kindergarten teachers and carrying out professional honor selection; improve relevant laws, regulations, and policies, clarify the legitimate rights and interests of private kindergarten teachers in terms of wages and benefits, endowment insurance, and medical security, and enhance teachers' professional identity to promote their active reflection.

### **3.6 Formulating Hierarchical Adaptation Strategies to Meet the Differentiated Needs of Teachers at Different Stages**

The phased characteristics of teacher professional development determine that the improvement of reflective competence must follow the principle of differentiation, avoiding "one-size-fits-all".

Novice teachers (0-3 years of teaching experience) should focus on technical-level reflection, with the core of consolidating the foundation. The focus of this stage is to help them master basic reflection methods, be able to identify superficial problems in teaching, and establish a direct connection between reflection and the improvement of professional skills. In implementation, structured reflection tools can be taken as the core, and a step-by-step path of observing excellent cases, imitating practice processes, targeted guidance from mentors, and reflecting and improving combined with feedback can be adopted, focusing on basic issues such as the appropriateness of care and education skills and the completeness of teaching processes. Organize collective reflection activities every month, mainly in the form of problem seeking and experience sharing, strengthening the supporting role of peer mutual assistance and expert leadership. In terms of support and guarantee, each novice teacher should be assigned an exclusive reflection mentor, and one-on-one guidance can often quickly solve the puzzles they encounter in the initial stage of reflection; give priority to arranging them to participate in basic reflection training, such as introductory courses on reflective journal writing skills and teaching problem identification methods, helping them quickly establish reflection confidence.

Proficient teachers (4-10 years of teaching experience) need to focus on situational-level reflection to achieve in-depth improvement. The core goal of this stage is to guide them to analyze complex educational situations combined with professional theories, optimize care and education strategies, and establish a close connection between reflection and the update of professional knowledge. In implementation, the reflection model of case analysis + action research can be promoted, focusing on in-depth issues such as the complexity of educational situations, the differences in children's developmental needs, and the adaptability of educational concepts and practices. Encourage them to take the lead in carrying out group collaborative reflection, use diversified tools such as multi-perspective analysis and 360° feedback, and conduct in-depth exploration on specific educational problems; complete high-quality reflection cases every quarter

and participate in result exchange and discussion within the region to improve the depth of reflection through collision. In terms of support and guarantee, advanced training can be provided, such as courses on the integration and application of educational theories and practices, and action research methods; give priority to arranging them to participate in cross-kindergarten teaching and research, expert consultations, and other activities to broaden their reflection horizons.

Expert teachers (more than 10 years of teaching experience) should focus on dialectical-level reflection and play a leading and innovative role. The core goal is to promote them to critically examine educational concepts and practices, explore educational innovation paths, and establish a positive interaction between reflection and professional leadership. In implementation, take critical reflection + educational research as the core, focusing on macro and in-depth issues such as the practical effect of educational policy implementation, the realization path of educational equity, and the innovation and optimization of care and education models. Encourage them to serve as reflection mentors to guide novice and proficient teachers in reflective practice; take the lead in carrying out relevant research projects, transforming reflection results into research papers, curriculum resources, and school-based training content, and playing a professional radiation role. In terms of support and guarantee, high-end research opportunities should be provided for them, such as international academic exchanges and special research project funding; build a result promotion platform, allowing their reflection results to benefit more peers through special lectures, case publications, and experience sharing, promoting the professional progress of the entire industry.

#### 4 CONCLUSIONS

This study systematically sorts out the correlation between kindergarten teachers' reflective competence and professional development, analyzes the four major dilemmas of current reflective practice (cognitive, content, methodological, and support dilemmas), constructs a closed-loop path for improving reflective competence of "concept guidance - content reconstruction - method innovation - system guarantee - support empowerment", and proposes hierarchical adaptation strategies for teachers at different professional development stages. Currently, reflective competence is the core fulcrum of kindergarten teachers' professional development, and the two present a mutually promoting and dynamically coordinated relationship. The improvement of reflective competence must closely focus on the core goals of updating professional concepts, optimizing professional knowledge, and advancing professional skills, avoiding formalistic reflection divorced from professional development; the essence of the current reflection dilemmas of kindergarten teachers is the "misalignment between reflective practice and professional development needs", which needs to be solved through systematic measures of "cognitive correction - content reconstruction - method upgrading - guarantee strengthening", and fragmented strategies of a single dimension can hardly solve the problem fundamentally; the closed-loop path constructed in this study has the characteristics of "clear goals, clear logic, and strong operability", and its innovations lie in: first, realizing the accurate connection between reflection content and the Professional Standards for Kindergarten Teachers (Trial), strengthening policy orientation; second, integrating hierarchical adaptation strategies to meet the differentiated needs of teachers at different stages; third, constructing a multi-dimensional support system of "individual - group - organization - society" to ensure the sustainability of the path; fourth, forming a closed loop of "cognition - practice - feedback - optimization" to ensure the deep binding of reflective competence and professional development.

In the future, action research can be carried out in kindergartens of different types and levels to track the implementation effect of the path. Through the analysis of reflection results and teacher interviews, the effectiveness and feasibility of the path can be tested, and the hierarchical adaptation strategies and support measures can be further optimized. Cross-regional comparative research can be carried out to explore the localized adjustment plans of the path in different regions and promote the balanced allocation of high-quality educational resources. With the application of technologies such as artificial intelligence and big data in the field of education, an intelligent reflection support platform can be explored in the future to accurately identify teachers' reflection shortcomings through data analysis and provide personalized reflection suggestions; use virtual reality (VR) technology to simulate educational scenarios and carry out immersive reflection training to improve the immediacy and effectiveness of reflection. In view of the current lack of scientific evaluation tools for kindergarten teachers' reflective competence, a four-dimensional evaluation system of "cognition - content - method - effect" can be constructed in the future based on the path framework of this study, and quantitative evaluation scales and qualitative evaluation indicators can be developed to provide tool support for the accurate evaluation and targeted improvement of reflective competence.

#### COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose.

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