Challenging process quality in Japanese ECEC settings (1): Results from the CEDEP large-scale staff survey

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About Cedep

- Established in July 2015
- The first academic organization for studying ECEC (Early Childhood Education and Care) from infancy in Japan

Cedep website
Outline

- **Introduction**
  - Aim of the study
  - Background

- **Methods**
  - Participants of the large-scale survey in 2015
  - Development of a self-report questionnaire

- **Results**
  - Results on classroom environment
  - Results on teacher-child interaction
  - Factors related to process quality

- **Discussion**
The study aims

1) to develop a self-report questionnaire on “process quality” in Japanese ECEC settings

2) to conduct a large-scale survey to examine the basic features of process quality based on practitioners’ responses.
• Process quality focuses on children’s interaction with practitioners, peers and materials which form their daily experiences in their classrooms (Howes et al., 2008).

• Classroom processes are considered a main promoter of children’s development and learning (Hamre et al., 2013).

• Process quality is evaluated by a number of tools such as ECERS-R(Harms, et al., 1998), CLASS(Pianta et al., 2008), SICS(Laevers et al., 2005), SSTEW(Siraj et al., 2015) and so on.
Although some tools have been used worldwide, ECEC practice and the concept of quality are embedded in social and cultural contexts (Tobin et al., 2009) and the development of *culturally appropriate tools* for quality assessment is necessary (Hu et al., 2015).

In a research project at our center (CEDEP), process quality assessment tools have been developed keeping in mind *cultural values* that are considered to be important by Japanese ECEC practitioners and researchers.
Two kinds of assessment tools:

- Self-report questionnaire
- Observation tool

Evaluation of the process quality of ECEC in Japan

Classroom & outside environment
Teacher-child interaction
A new ECEC system, the “Comprehensive Support System for Children and Childrearing,” has been introduced in Japan in 2015.

“QUANTITY vs. QUALITY” is one of the big challenges in ECEC provision.

The number of children wait-listed for childcare centers keeps rising because of the increase in the number of working mothers.
Classroom and outside environment

• In Japanese ECEC curricula, the arrangement and utilization of the classroom environment to promote the well-being and development of children is given special importance.

• Japan has a relatively small indoor space requirement in child care (OECD, 2012). Indoor and outdoor spaces are particularly limited in bigger cities.

• Making better use of limited spaces may be one of the challenges in ECEC settings.

What efforts are made by Japanese ECEC teachers to better arrange the classroom environment?
Teacher-child interaction

• Japanese teachers/carers traditionally emphasize “child-centeredness,” “showing empathy to children,” “accepting children,” and “encouraging children’s motivation” in ECEC (Kaneda et al., 2000).

• Showing empathy to children is the Ideal image of ECEC teachers in Japan (Suwa et al., 2011).

• Revised ECEC curricula will be implemented in 2018. Specifically, the role of teachers in supporting children to think and learn deeply is given more importance.

What aspects of teacher-child interaction are emphasized by Japanese ECEC teachers in their practice?
1. What are the basic characteristics of ECEC process quality in Japan?
   - Classroom environment
   What efforts are made by Japanese ECEC teachers to better arrange the classroom environment?
   - Teacher-child interaction
   What aspects of teacher-child interaction are emphasized by Japanese ECEC teachers in their practice?

2. Which factors contribute to classroom process quality?
Methods: Participants of the large-scale survey in 2015

- Directors, chiefs, and practitioners in 1, 3, 5-year-old classes in ECEC settings responded to our questionnaire. The total number of participants was 30,700 and average response rate was about 35%.

The number of settings where the questionnaires were delivered:

- **3402 Kindergartens**
  - Response rate: 40%
- **2565 Integrated ECEC Centers**
  - Response rate: 45%
- **4937 Day Care Centers**
  - Response rate: 50%
- **1654 Municipal Level Centers**
  - Response rate: 35%
- **7821 Unlicensed Day Care Centers**
  - Response rate: 15%
### Methods:
**Topics in the questionnaire**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Director</th>
<th>Senior staff</th>
<th>Classroom staff (1, 3, &amp; 5-year-old)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| • Physical environment  
• Safety  
• Center issues  
• Support for disabled children  
• Number of staff, children, classes  
• Staff qualifications  
• In-service training  
• Self evaluation etc. | • Communication among staff  
• Communication between staff and parents  
• Curriculum  
• Digital devices (i.e. music and movies) | • Classroom and outside environment  
• Interaction between staff and children  
• Curriculum and practice |

**Leadership**

- Job burden, health, job satisfaction
- Evaluation of own quality

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A self-report questionnaire on classroom practice was developed (5-point scale).

Two domains of process quality i.e. “classroom and outside environment” and “teacher-child interaction” were included.

The items were developed following the concepts of widely used scales such as ECERS-R (Harms, et al., 1998), CLASS (Pianta et al., 2008), SICS (Laevers et al., 2005), SSTEW (Siraj et al., 2015).

Some items were modified according to suggestions by Japanese expert ECEC researchers in terms of cultural appropriateness of content and expression.
(1) What are the basic characteristics of classroom process quality in Japanese ECEC?

- Classroom environment
- Teacher-child interaction
Developmentally appropriate play materials and equipment

Space and materials for spontaneous play

Displays related to life, culture and children

Quiet areas for relaxing

Separated play areas for different kinds of play

Displays related to life, culture and children

Developmentally appropriate play materials and equipment

Accommodations for younger and older class

Space and materials for spontaneous play

Separated areas for relaxing and active play
I prepare developmentally appropriate play materials in play areas.
I prepare play materials for enhancing children’s experiences.

There is space for relaxing in the classroom.
The relaxing space is not disturbed by other children.
**Classroom environment in 3-yr-old class**

*Similar results were found on classroom environment in 5-yr-old class*

- **Separated play areas for different kinds of play**: Mean score of 3.70
- **Developmentally appropriate play materials**: Mean score of 3.62
- **Display related to life, culture, and children**: Mean score of 3.83
- **Space and materials for spontaneous play**: Mean score of 3.67
- **Separated areas for relaxing and active play**: Mean score of 3.44

**5 point-scale (1-5)**

I display something related to life and culture familiar to children in the classroom.

I display something indicating the season in the classroom.

There is space for relaxing in the classroom.

The relaxing space is not disturbed by other children’s active play.
What the results imply about Japanese ECEC

• Relatively high score on
  “Developmentally appropriate play materials” (1) and
  “Display related to life, culture and children” (3 & 5)

• Relatively low score on
  “Quiet areas for relaxing (1)” and
  “Separated areas for relaxing and active play” (3 & 5)

Indoor space is limited and it may be difficult to ensure enough space for relaxing in the classroom.
(1) What are the basic characteristics of classroom process quality in Japanese ECEC?

- Classroom environment
- Teacher-child interaction
Factor structure of teacher-child interaction

1-yr-old class
- Acceptance, empathy, listening
- Supporting autonomous play and activities
- Clarifying daily regulations and play rules

3-yr-old class & 5-yr-old class
- Supporting children’s interest and exploration through play and activities
- Acceptance, empathy, listening
- Supporting group play and activities
- Warm and accepting climate
- Clarifying daily regulations and play rules
Teacher-child interaction in 1-yr-old class

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Acceptance, empathy, listening</th>
<th>Supporting autonomous play and activities</th>
<th>Clarifying daily rules and play rules</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Score</td>
<td>4.447</td>
<td>4.255</td>
<td>3.998</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- I accept children’s expression of feelings, e.g. sadness, anger etc.
- I respond positively to children’s expression of joy and excitement.
- I talk to children at their eye-level and so on

5 point-scale (1-5)
I encourage children to be interested in surrounding things.
I observe children’s interests and inquiring minds carefully and include their interests into their play.
I discuss children’s interests and inquiring minds with children and parents.
What the results imply about Japanese ECEC

• High score on
  “Acceptance, empathy, listening” (all ages) and
  “Supporting group play and activities” (3 & 5)

• Relatively low score on
  “Supporting children’s interests and inquiring minds through
  play and activities” (3 & 5)

The government is now emphasizing the importance of **supporting sparks of children’s interests and inquiring minds** in ECEC provision and practice.
Result on RQ2:

(2) What factors contribute to classroom process quality?
• The contribution of other variables to process quality was analyzed by multiple regression analyses.
• Multiple regression analyses were conducted for each age of the class in each kind of setting.

**Independent variables**

- **teacher related variables** (age, education, years of experience, job burden etc.)
- **settings related variables** (director’s leadership, chief teacher’s leadership, in-service training etc.)

**Dependent variables**

- Classroom & outside environment
- Teacher-child interaction
Summary of the results of multiple regression analyses

Classroom & outside environment

- Enough resources (materials, time)
- Good relationship with parents and children

Teacher-child interaction

- Leadership provided by chief teachers
- Good relationship with parents and children
The strengths of Japanese ECEC process quality:

- Teachers tend to take care in preparing **developmentally appropriate play materials** and **displays related to life, culture and children** in the classroom.
- Teachers tend to show **acceptance and empathy**, to **listen** to children, and **support group play and activities** especially for 3-5 years old children.

The challenges of Japanese ECEC process quality:

- Teachers tend to feel that it is difficult to **ensure relaxing space** in classrooms.
- The scores on **supporting children’s interests and inquiring minds through play and activities** are relatively low.
**The factors related to classroom environment:**

- Enough resources (materials, time) and good relationship with parents and children might be important for the quality of classroom environment.

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**The factors related to teacher-child interaction:**

- Leadership provided by chief teachers and good relationship with parents and children might be important for the quality of teacher-child interaction.

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**Discussion**

*Enough resources, leadership, good relationship with parents and children* might be the important factors which encourage practitioners to improve process quality in their classroom.


Kaneda et al., 2000 (金田利子・諏訪きぬ・土方弘子 2000 「保育の質」の探求－「保育者－子ども関係」を基軸として－ 京都：ミネルヴァ書房.)

OECD (2012) Quality Matters in Early Childhood Education and Care: JAPAN


Suwa et al., 2011(諏訪きぬ（監修）・戸田有一・中坪史典・高橋真由美・上月智晴（編著） 2011 保育における感情労働－保育者の専門性を考える視点として－ 京都：北王路書房.)