

Characteristics of Japanese Mothers Viewed from an International Survey

Takashi Muto, Research Professor at Shiraume Gakuen University Graduate School



I would like to summarize the characteristics of Japanese mothers as seen in the results of this survey. A tendency toward prioritization of independence in the preschool years and low prioritization on early education can be seen in the childrearing attitude of Japanese mothers. While valuing “having firm opinions,” Japanese mothers want to raise their children to become people who value friends and family. On the other hand, they also prefer to maintain traditional values such as wanting their children to become people who will not cause problems or trouble for others, and show relatively little interest in areas such as society or work. While valuing their children and cultivating a spirit of independence in them, a tendency to emphasize the meaning of family can also be observed.

As for the “attitudes of learning to learn,” the five aspects, which comprise “curiosity,” “collaborative skills,” “self-assertion,” “self-restraint,” and “perseverance,” showed a tendency to grow in the very order, rather than developing simultaneously. In addition, relevance was observed between the “supportive childrearing attitude” of mothers and “attitudes of learning to learn.” These tendencies were also observed in the other three countries.

In addition, although omitted from this bulletin, the behavior of mothers playing

with their children are linked to “curiosity.” Moreover, a learning environment arranged by their mothers can often lead the children to acquire numeracy. Mothers’ attitudes of encouraging logical thinking in their children has a strong correlation with the growth of “attitudes of learning to learn” in children and seems to stimulate the development of skills in areas such as “classification” and “language.” In sum, parents in Japan are diverse. It can be said that preschool education develops independence in children. It may be that parents’ childrearing attitudes of encouraging qualities such as ambition and independence develop “attitudes of learning to learn.” However, the acquisition of such skills as numeracy and letters seems to be influenced by textbooks and other environmental improvements aimed at developing such skills rather than the childrearing attitudes of parents.

This comparative study research of the four countries has not only shown us the common aspects of parents rearing young children, but has shed light on the differences between cultures and even the social class within them. It may also be attributed to the changes from the flow of times. Most of all, changes could be observed in parental awareness and human relationships, and the views on learning equipments, media, and play.

Findings from International Surveys Regarding Home Education during Early Childhood

Yoichi Sakakihara, Professor Emeritus at Ochanomizu University/Director of Child Research Net



I feel that the results of the survey detailed here include findings of considerable interest. Firstly, the fact that the structure of “attitudes of learning to learn” in children were more or less identical in the four countries surveyed, each having different cultures and histories, demonstrates the universality of home education environments. I believe that this proves that the development of preschool education is a global issue.

Moreover, the survey showed that “supportive” attitudes of mothers toward childrearing foster “attitudes of learning to learn” in children, confirming that Japan, where the practice of supportive preschool education is maintained, has made the right choice — a totally flattering result.

On the other hand, the survey raised several points of concern. Regarding what children mean to their parents, more responses in Japan cited “connection between my spouse/partner and me” than in the other countries, while conversely, those answering “person who will play a part in future society” was the lowest of all the countries, demonstrating a somewhat introverted tendency in Japanese homes. As China and Indonesia are experiencing remarkable economic growth, it can be said that there is a strong tendency to see children as people who will shoulder responsibility

for the society of the future, while in Finland as well, a country that already has a mature economy, parents have expectations of their children playing leading roles in the society of the future. In Japan, a country with the world’s most rapidly declining birth rates and aging population, the low percentage of response indicating expectations of the children contributing to society suggests that this is an issue that needs to be studied.

Furthermore, in the media-oriented environment of today that is such an important part of the childrearing environment, another issue is that the number of respondents in Japan indicating that their children used tablet terminals, a new media in the IoT (Internet of Things) society, was the lowest among all four countries. While, in the United States, it has been suggested that digital media such as tablet terminals may contribute to the development of children, tablet usage in Japan is only one-third that of Finland, and it may be said that this is a matter of concern in modern Japanese society where emphasis is placed on STEM education.

STEM education: Education that focuses on and integrates the four fields of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics

“Attitudes of Learning to Learn” during Early Childhood and the Cultural Differences in Childrearing Attitude of Parents

Misako Aramaki, Associate Professor at Mejiro University



This survey took the form of comparison of Japan with other countries based on knowledge accumulated from international surveys to date regarding the relationship between the involvement of parents during early childhood and the cultivation of cognitive and non-cognitive skills in children. To ensure that there were no inconsistencies arising from circumstances in each of the target countries when selecting survey items for international comparison, selection was carried out with the utmost care with guidance from experts in each country. However, analysis of the data acquired from responses revealed the involvement of parents believed to be ideal in Japan was not necessarily so in the other countries surveyed, possibly resulting in differing evaluations. For example, it seems that the rhythm of daily life on weekdays and holidays in Finland does not change much, with the result that parents do not make a special effort to foster the habit of going to bed and getting up early. Differences were observed among the countries surveyed in areas such as strict insistence on good table manners or controlling the degree to which children use such

devices as smartphones and tablets.

In addition, while involvement of parents in Japan may seem somewhat excessively interfering and negative, this is not necessarily the case in Indonesia. While the survey suggested that the “supportive parental attitude” had a positive influence on “attitudes of learning to learn” in countries such as Japan, China and Finland, it also showed that there was a positive relationship between the “protective parental attitude” and elements such as “self-restraint” in children in Indonesia. While to a certain extent, the structural elements of “attitudes of learning to learn” can be said to be common to all the target countries, regarding the involvement of parents in developing such skills, there are no absolute preferences or ideals. It can probably be said that factors such as sense of values based on the cultural backgrounds of each country also influence such factors as the childrearing attitudes of parents and the development of children.

Reflecting on the Survey

Benesse Educational Research and Development Institute

Seiko Mochida,
Senior Researcher at Benesse Educational Research and Development Institute

Parental Involvement Common beyond Sociocultural Environments and “Attitudes of Learning to Learn”

I would first like to extend my sincere gratitude to the various experts both in and outside Japan who participated in the planning and supervision of the survey and the approximately 4,900 mothers in the four countries who responded to the numerous questions. This survey provides valuable knowledge for our increasingly globalized society of today. It shows that even in the different sociocultural environments of the countries surveyed, fostering “attitudes of learning to learn” in early childhood is given importance in childrearing and related to supportive involvement by parents with respect for the wishes of their child. It is my wish that the findings gained from this survey will provide further insight and perspectives that will be useful to parents and others involved in preschool education in each of the four countries when considering home education in early childhood.