

How Do ECEC Teachers Perceive Children’s “Difficulties” and Implement Practices to Nurture Their Resilience?

- Results of Interview Surveys Conducted on ECEC Teachers in Eight Asian Countries

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(1) Purpose of This Study

Suggestions From Previous Studies

Previous studies have shown that the COVID-19 pandemic has negatively affected the mental health of children (Tull et al., 2020; Mochida et al., 2021). Hence, we conducted a survey in 2021 using questionnaires aimed at mothers in eight different Asian countries. Our analysis confirmed that children's resilience (capacity to adapt and bounce back from difficulties) is associated with their well-being (Ogawa et al., 2024). Based on these findings, we identified the next research topic as considering childcare practices on how to nurture children's resilience.

Purpose of This Study

This study aims to investigate the actual practices of ECEC teachers in fostering children's resilience.

To confirm the preconditions, we intended to understand how ECEC teachers perceive children's difficulties and adversities as underlying factors. It is based on an interview survey conducted across eight Asian countries to obtain the overall and country-specific results.

Research Questions

- 1) What do ECEC teachers think are “difficulties” or “adversities” for preschool children?
- 2) What are the efforts and practices by ECEC teachers in nurturing children's resilience?

This study will show the trends in each country in Asia, and then focus on Japan with regard to the research questions above.

(2) Brief Description of the Survey

Outline of Research

Participating countries/regions	Japan, China, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Taiwan, and Thailand
Survey method	Interview survey (Semi-structured online interview)
Survey Period	December 2023 to February 2024
Subjects	ECEC teachers mainly in charge of 4 to 6-year-olds (approx. 10 per country, 82 in total)

Method

To ensure consistent perceptions of the concept of resilience among the subjects, we introduced to them the core concept of resilience as “the ability to adapt successfully despite adversity/difficulty” and “the ability to bounce back from adversities and difficulties” with an illustration in the middle of our survey.

Case reports were compiled in each country based on the survey results. After extracting the answers of each ECEC teacher to specific question items such as “Difficulties or adversities for children aged 4-6” “Perception of the term ‘resilience’” and “Childcare approach you and your colleagues take / specific settings or situations / developmental programs or materials to nurture the concept of resilience in children,” we compiled a list of these extracted answers for each country and performed a comparison analysis.

Analysis of “Difficulties and Adversities”:

The subjects’ answers were divided into segments (units) and classified using the six dimensions of the KINDL^R scale, which measures QOL (Ravens-Sieberer & Bullinger, 2000). This classification was based on the interpretation that "difficulty" means a state in which quality of life (QOL) is not satisfied. The sixth dimension of “nursery school/kindergarten” was further divided into “daily life/activities” and “learning” for more specific situations. “Adversity” was classified based on the literature regarding adverse experiences (Hays-Grudo & Morris, 2020/2022).

Analysis of "Childcare Practices and Programs that Foster the Concept of Resilience":

Based on the provided answers, we calculated the recognition rate of the term "resilience," the implementation rate of practices considering the concept of resilience, as well as the implementation rate of programs nurturing resilience in each country. Additionally, we extracted specific content from these practices and programs.

(3) Results

1. “Difficulties” or “Adversities” for Preschool Children According to ECEC Teachers

Table 1: Classification of Difficulties and Adversities (comparison of eight countries)

Country	Number of Subjects	①Physical Well-being	②Emotional Well-being	③Self-esteem/independence	④Family	⑤Friends	⑥Nursery school/Kindergarten (daily life/activities)	⑦Nursery school/Kindergarten (learning)	⑧Adverse Experiences	⑨Others	Total	Number of difficulties/adversities
		(%)										
Malaysia	7	10.5	25.0	14.5	5.3	11.8	15.8	5.3	9.2	2.6	100	76
Philippines	15	5.9	29.4	11.8	5.9	11.8	17.6	5.9	0.0	11.8	100	17
Japan	11	0.0	7.1	42.9	0.0	25.0	17.9	0.0	0.0	7.1	100	28
Taiwan	10	3.3	16.7	30.0	10.0	3.3	10.0	13.3	3.3	10.0	100	30
Indonesia	9	0.0	12.9	22.6	16.1	3.2	16.1	9.7	6.5	12.9	100	31
China	10	3.6	28.6	25.0	3.6	3.6	14.3	10.7	3.6	7.1	100	28
Singapore	9	7.1	7.1	10.7	14.3	17.9	17.9	14.3	10.7	0.0	100	28
Thailand	11	0.0	4.2	16.7	12.5	25.0	25.0	0.0	16.7	0.0	100	24

※The top items are underlined for each country.
※The top items and items within 5% difference from the top items are shaded for each country (colors are differentiated according to the following three trends)

*Prominent : There is a difference of 5% or more with other items.

1) Eight countries are broadly categorized into three trends

- **Prominent* number of difficulties relating to “②Emotional Well-being”:** Malaysia and the Philippines
※Examples of difficulties relating to “②Emotional Well-being”: separation anxiety, social withdrawal (such as being alone at kindergarten), worries and anxieties, problems controlling emotions, etc.
- **Prominent number of difficulties relating to “③Self-esteem/Independence”:** Japan, Taiwan, Indonesia
※Examples of difficulties relating to “③Self-esteem/Independence”: a gap between what one wants to do and one's actual abilities, recognition of one's weaknesses compared to others, inability to ask for help, low self-expression and self-esteem, lack of self-determination/problem-solving abilities, etc.
- **Difficulties across multiple items:** China, Singapore, Thailand

2) Characteristics of Japan

- The rate of talking about difficulties relating to “③Self-esteem/independence” was exceptionally high, followed by “⑤Friends” and “⑥Nursery school/Kindergarten (daily life/activities).” These top three items accounted for almost the entirety of the total, which is a major characteristic compared with other countries.
- There was no mention made about difficulties relating to “①Physical Well-being,” “④Family,” “⑦Nursery school/Kindergarten (learning),” as well as “⑧Adverse Experiences.”

2. Efforts and Practices by ECEC teachers in Nurturing Children’s Resilience

Table 2: Practices Considering the Concept of Resilience, Implementation Rate of Programs, and Recognition of Resilience (comparison of eight countries)

Country	Subjects	Practices considering the concept of resilience	Implementation of programs	Recognition of resilience
	(Number of subjects)	(%)	(%)	(%)
Japan	11	100	9.1	54.5
Malaysia	7	100	42.9	100.0
Philippines	15	80	20.0	80.0
Thailand	11	100	72.7	81.8
Singapore	9	100	22.2	100.0
Indonesia	9	78	22.2	88.9
China	10	50	10.0	30.0
Taiwan	10	80	40.0	60.0

※Special activities with program names are counted as programs. Also, programs for which the subjects indicated these would lead to fostering resilience (including STEM and PBL) are counted as programs, even if these programs are not directly designed to nurture resilience.

1) Implementation rate of practices that consider the concept of resilience and recognition of resilience

Japan, Malaysia, Thailand, and Singapore were the countries where 100% of the subjects answered that they implement practices considering the concept of resilience. Of these, 100% of the subjects recognized the term “resilience” in Malaysia and Singapore, while 81.8% recognize it in Thailand. In contrast, only 54.5% of the subjects recognized the term in Japan. Despite this result, the practices implemented in Japan were based on the concept of resilience. ECEC teachers in Japan provide children with challenging activities that children would want to try through everyday play and life, sports days, and recitals, and promote the experience of challenging and overcoming difficulties. They also take approaches such as showing empathy to children, using positive language, and encouraging mutual learning and support through sharing with friends. These practices are similar to those in Malaysia and Singapore, where the recognition rate of resilience was 100%.

2) Implementation rate of programs

The implementation rate of programs was particularly high in Thailand, compared to other countries where it was 50% or lower. In Thailand, a wide variety of programs related to emotional education are implemented, such as 7 habits, emotional check-in and check-out, mindful education, and anger management.

(4) Discussion

<What We Found in This Research Paper>
1. Difficulties or Adversities for preschool children in eight countries were categorized into three trends.
2. In Japan, although only 54.5% of the subjects recognized the term “resilience,” 100% of them implemented practices that consider the concept of resilience.
3. ECEC teachers in Japan tend to view children's difficulties and adversities from children's personal perspectives, rather than environmental aspects surrounding them, such as their family.

Resilience is the “ability to adapt to and bounce back from difficulties and adversities.” In this survey, we first examined how ECEC teachers perceive difficulties and adversities preschool children may face. Through this analysis, we identified specific trends, such as countries with a prominent number of difficulties relating to “②Emotional Well-being” (Malaysia and the Philippines), those with a prominent number of difficulties relating to “③Self-esteem/Independence” (Japan, Taiwan, and Indonesia), and those with difficulties across multiple items (China, Singapore, and Thailand).

Next, we conducted a comparative analysis of ECEC teachers’ resilience practices and found some distinctive results in Japan. Specifically, although only 54.5% of the subjects in Japan recognized the term “resilience,” 100% of them implemented practices that consider the concept of resilience. This can be explained by Japan's national curriculums for early childhood education and care, which position early childhood education as an essential factor fostering the foundation for lifelong personality development. These curriculums emphasize developing qualities and abilities and include content deeply related to resilience, even though the word “resilience” is not used.

For example, the preamble to the National Curriculum Standard for Kindergartens states, “Kindergartens in future must also foster the foundation necessary to enable children to become the creators of a sustainable society. This can be achieved by encouraging each young child to recognize his/her goodness and potential, respect all others as worthy individuals, collaborate with diverse people while overcoming various social changes, and clear the path for a rich life in the future” (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 2017). It explicitly states that kindergartens should foster children's ability to collaborate while respecting each child's dignity, cope with social changes, and become the creators of a sustainable society; in other words, to foster the zest for living, including resilience. In addition, the “Ideal Image by the End of Childhood” contains some elements such as “accomplish without giving up” and “control one's feelings and compromise with friends” (Sato et al., 2024. Translated by the author).

Nevertheless, it cannot be said that childcare practices in Japan are sufficiently fostering resilience, as ECEC teachers in Japan did not mention difficulties relating to “①Physical Well-being,” “④Family,” “⑦Nursery school/Kindergarten (learning),” as well as “⑧Adverse Experiences.” This suggests that ECEC teachers in Japan tend to view children's difficulties and adversities from children's personal perspectives, rather than environmental aspects surrounding them, such as their family. Resilience is a concept that encompasses both individual and environmental aspects surrounding individuals (Ungar, 2008, 2011; Resilience Research Centre, 2018). If the understanding of resilience is more widely spread among ECEC teachers in Japan, they will be able to pay more attention to various difficulties for children. A deeper understanding of children will lead to more enriched childcare practices.

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