

**5 - 1 From the Collaborative Researchers****Christine Chen (Singapore)    President, Association for Early Childhood Educators (Singapore)**

This qualitative study captures the perspectives of 8 countries and regions in the East and South-East Asian region. The concept of social emotional skills (SES) and resilience had varied understanding among the early childhood practitioners interviewed. Their depth of understanding in the two concepts was of varying degrees. However, generally, the concept of social emotional skills is better established than that of resilience.

In relation to the concept of SES, in the Philippines, it is found in the subject for Values Education. The practitioners in Singapore, like the Philippines where the working language is English, were familiar with SES as it is embedded in the teachers' preparation program and were able to describe how a child high in SES would behave. Malaysia, like Singapore being once a British Colony, recognized SES as being crucial for children's development and SES is part of their 0-4 curriculum. Thailand perceived SES as being associated with Executive Functions (EF) and much emphasis was focused on EF. While practitioners recognized the importance of SES in Indonesia, an in-depth understanding of the concept was a challenge. This gives us an indication that concepts in the English language may not be so readily understood where English is not the first or working language. As such, in China, Japan and Taiwan such concepts had to be related to what they know in their own language and culture. In China, the principals are more familiar with the concept of SES than the teachers. In Taiwan these concepts were somewhat new to practitioners and in Japan's curriculum standards "children are to become the creators of a sustainable society."

While "resilience" is a difficult concept to grasp, the early childhood leaders in Singapore were able to give a crisp definition of the word and the teachers were able to describe situations in which they witnessed resilience in the children. This again points to how familiarity with the English language affects the understanding of the two concepts under study. As such, I question the meaning of these concepts to each of the countries in this study. Also, when the practitioners were asked if they had any program to enhance SES and resilience, most of them replied that there was no specific program. However, Indonesia and Malaysia related how the Project Approach and Singapore the Science Technology Engineering Arts Mathematics Innovation and Entrepreneurship (STEAMIE) can enhance SES and resilience.

While in the findings, each country had their definition or understanding of what SES and resilience mean, I note that China promotes families, kindergarten and society working together in creating "collective living atmosphere" of warmth and care. Others talked about quality education, good citizenship, building relationships and sustainable society. Since the 8 countries and regions have diverse histories and cultures on which their society is built around, it might be worthwhile to investigate what they would like their future society to look like. It would be enlightening to hear from children, families and early childhood practitioners what they would like their future society to look like. By doing so, we may discover the similarity among us that would build solidarity in this region.

**Tomomi Sato (Japan)    Professor, Aichi Shukutoku University**

This survey shows that while ECEC teachers in Japan have a low perception of the term "resilience," they consider it an essential skill that is inherently integrated and practiced in their daily childcare activities. They emphasize providing adequate challenges through play, such as stilts and jumping rope, according to children's developmental stage. For 5-year-old class children, they also focus on making them challenge activities as a class/group. This survey also revealed valuable insights from childcare programs in Thailand and other countries, including Indonesia's disaster curriculum. By enhancing ECEC teachers' understanding of the concept of resilience and how it can be nurtured, and by making them more aware of the childcare practices they unconsciously engage in every day, they will be able to offer more effective support to children. In that sense, this report was very meaningful, which examines commonalities and differences through a survey conducted in eight countries and regions.

In addition, through this survey, many ECEC teachers from Japan, Taiwan, and Indonesia noted children's difficulties and adversities by relating them to children's "self-esteem and independence." Specific examples include the gap between what children can do and want to do, awareness of their weaknesses compared to peers, weakness of autonomy or self-expression, as well as decreased motivation to learn. In response to these issues, it is observed that ECEC teachers would first accept children's feelings and acknowledge their thoughts. Instead of guiding children to the correct answer or immediately having them solve the problem, they value the process of letting children think on their own. Then they support the solutions children independently discover and place importance on allowing them to work on the problem at their own pace. Meanwhile, ECEC teachers from Malaysia and the Philippines frequently referred to children's "emotional well-being." For example, they explained their practices, such as providing a place for children to calm down and sort out their feelings and using circle time to share their feelings and thoughts with peers. These practices may reflect the curriculum guidelines and childcare philosophies of each country. Instead of simply assessing the superiority or inferiority of childcare practices in each country, I believe it is essential to maintain objective attitudes, learn factors that have not been addressed, and explore innovative approaches.

Through this survey conducted in Japan, I was deeply impressed by the attitudes of the ECEC teachers, who believe in children's potential and watch over them warmly, yet sometimes strictly. I have come to realize once again the remarkable efforts of ECEC teachers by tenaciously engaging with children and offering them loving attention as they learn and grow through trial and error. These qualities of ECEC teachers are observed not only in Japan but also in all eight countries and regions, which became evident from ECEC teachers' daily childcare practices and underlying philosophies mentioned in this survey. I hope that the findings of this survey will enhance practices in childcare settings and support at home, ultimately improving the well-being of children.

## 5 - 2 Insights from the Research Results and Discussions



This survey was conducted between 2023 and 2024, targeting ECEC teachers across eight Asian countries and regions to explore how children's resilience is nurtured in preschools. Resilience is a crucial skill for navigating through uncertain times and for bouncing back and moving forward through everyday challenges and conflicts. This report summarizes and compares survey results from eight countries/regions from various perspectives on nurturing children's resilience. First, we assessed how ECEC teachers perceive and interpret the terms "resilience" and "social-emotional skills," the latter being a concept closely relating to resilience (pp.14-15). We also examined ECEC teachers' perceptions of the difficulties and adversities young children might face, as well as the implementation rate of childcare practices that promote resilience in each country (pp.16-17). Additionally, for each difficulty type, we analyzed the childcare practices and involvement of ECEC teachers in handling such difficulties in preschools across eight countries and regions (pp.18-21). In the final part, we have presented responses where we asked ECEC teachers to choose two or more from four specific resilience-related scenarios and explain how they would interact as a childcare worker, which we have organized by scenario and introduced them as case examples (pp.22-25). I will present what we found from our analysis in this commentary.

### **Despite Differences in the Degree of Term Perceptions Across Countries and Regions, Commonalities Seen in Childcare Practices**

The degree of perception of the terms "social-emotional skills" and "resilience" among ECEC teachers varied significantly across Asia. These concepts were more widely recognized in Southeast Asian countries (Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, and the Philippines) than in East Asian countries and regions (Japan, Taiwan, and China). There were also country-specific differences among ECEC teachers regarding children's difficulties and adversities. These differences, observed across eight countries and regions, can be categorized into three main trends: countries where the most common response pertains to "difficulties relating to emotional well-being" (Malaysia and the Philippines); countries/regions where "difficulties relating to self-esteem/independence" are more prevalent (Japan, Taiwan, and Indonesia); and countries where challenges arise from a combination of multiple factors, represented by China, Singapore, and Thailand. However, despite such differences, the above analysis results, as well as the case studies of how teachers respond in each scenario, also revealed that several common practices are shared across many of the eight countries. For instance, regarding "difficulties relating to emotional well-being," one of the strategies of ECEC teachers was "providing opportunities for children to share their thoughts and feelings with their peers as well as discussing ways to support one another." This practice was noted not only by ECEC teachers from Malaysia and Taiwan, whose specific examples are introduced in this report, but also by those from Japan, China, Thailand, and Singapore. This finding suggests that there are ECEC teachers in each country who have a good understanding of each child's state and circumstances, potentially leading to common childcare practices across the eight countries and regions. These ECEC teachers interact with children while caring for how they feel, which may contribute to the development of resilience in children.

### **ECEC Teachers Need Not Bear Issues Alone, but Respond with Classmates, Professionals, and Parents**

To address "difficulties relating to physical well-being," specifically for children with special needs, one of the ECEC teachers from Malaysia mentioned that she would seek assistance from classmates and professionals. This ECEC teacher's approach of asking other children for help instead of trying to solve problems alone may enhance not only the resilience of children with special needs, but also the development of their peers who provide support, ultimately improving the resilience of the entire class. Furthermore, rather than trying to solve every problem within the preschool, seeking assistance from external professionals when necessary, can benefit not only the children with special needs but also the ECEC teachers' learning and support they need. To address "problems in family matters," ECEC teachers from the Philippines and Indonesia discussed their strategies for building trusting relationships with parents and collaboratively supporting the child's education. This indicates the importance of collaborating with parents and exchanging information to foster children's resilience. In addition, some countries such as Thailand and Indonesia, mentioned childcare practices not discussed by other countries. The former approach is "giving children time to reflect on their feelings" when facing "difficulties relating to emotional well-being," while the latter approach is to deal with "difficulties in adversities." These approaches would also be applicable in countries other than Thailand and Indonesia.

### **Childcare Practices Nurturing Resilience May Offer Tips for Early Childhood Transition to Elementary School as Well as Parenting**

We encourage ECEC teachers to read and apply the results of this survey to their childcare practices. Furthermore, the childcare practices identified in this survey that promote children's resilience effectively address and support children's difficulties, confusion, and anxiety from various perspectives during their transition to elementary school, when significant changes occur in relationships with others and the surrounding environment. They may also be helpful for teachers in lower elementary schools to ensure smooth transitions. Additionally, some childcare practices presented in this report can serve as valuable references for parent-child involvement at home. For example, parents often try to help their children in advance to avoid making mistakes. However, sometimes, watching over children's actions by stepping back and allowing them to solve problems independently or presenting them with moderate challenges suitable for their developmental level may contribute to their children's growth.

In closing, it should be noted that the survey findings may not necessarily represent typical childcare practices in each country since this survey is a case study examining ECEC teachers from eight Asian countries and regions, in which respondents were chosen from a limited number of preschools using a snowball sampling method (for more details, please refer to the "Attributes of Respondents" on p.5). To gain a comprehensive understanding of how resilience is nurtured in preschools in each country, it is crucial to conduct a quantitative questionnaire survey in preschools, followed by interviews with ECEC teachers from a diverse range and type of preschools in each country.