

## ECEC Quality in Japan

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### 1. The situation surrounding ECEC in Japan

We have three types of early childhood education and care (ECEC) facilities in Japan. The first is **kindergartens**, which serve children between the ages of 3 and 5 years. They are typically open from morning through early afternoon. Some kindergartens accept children before and after their usual opening hours and during extended holidays. These are facilities that offer early stage education to provide a base for elementary school. **Day care centers** accept children aged 5 years and younger. They are open from morning through evening. These facilities provide care for children whose parents both work or otherwise cannot care for them at home. **Centers for early childhood education and care** (*Nintei kodomo-en*) also care for children through 5 years of age. They are most often open from morning through early afternoon for students between the ages of 3 and 5. Some facilities accept children before and after their usual opening hours and during extended hours. Opening times are from morning through evening for children of all ages. These facilities provide integrated education and care, regardless of whether students' parents work or not.

Given the circumstances of these types of care facilities, especially with regard to ECEC for children 0 to 2 years old, there are many children on waiting lists to attend day care centers. Because there are not enough centers, many women have to quit their jobs after becoming pregnant. A couple of years ago, a blog written by one mother became a social scandal. The title was, "My child wasn't accepted for nursery school. Die, Japan!!!"

The problem of day care centers' waiting lists is serious in metropolitan areas, and especially in Tokyo. According to a survey by the University of Tokyo, the local government facilities with serious

waiting lists account for only about 20% of all facilities in Japan.

Nevertheless, public opinion is more interested in increasing and expanding the number of ECEC facilities than in improving the facilities' quality. However, the period from birth to 5 years is the most important time for cultivating the foundation for a child's character formation. Preschools, including kindergartens, day care centers, and ECEC centers are places where young children spend most of their days, so it is natural that we want to improve the quality of the ECEC they deliver. ECEC quality is a problem that concerns all preschools in Japan. It is also being studied in the new system, "Comprehensive Support System for Children and Child-rearing" which began in 2015.

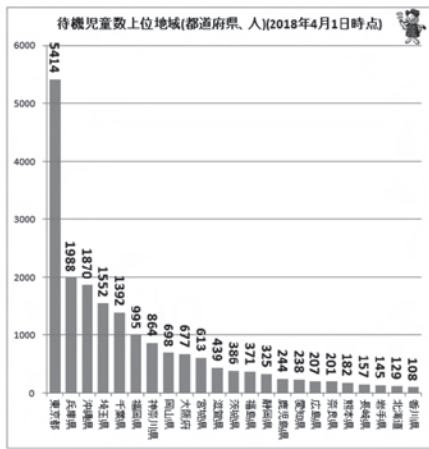
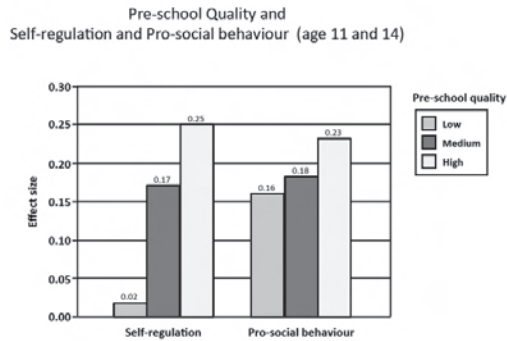
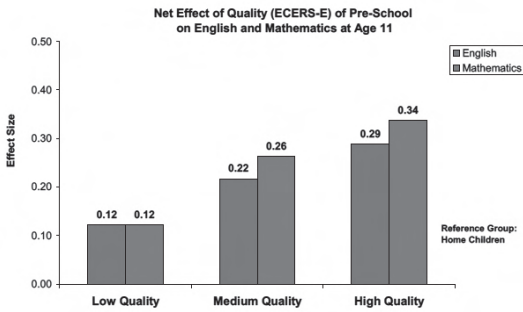
### 2. The relationship between ECEC quality and children's development

We can see some evidence for the relationship between ECEC quality and children's development. For example, the Perry Preschool Project, which began in 1962, is one of the most famous studies in this field.

In addition, the EPPE / EPPSE Project, in the UK (Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford & Taggart 2004; Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford, & Taggart 2010; Taggart, Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons & Siraj 2015), is of particular importance. Children who received high quality ECEC reap positive effects in their English and mathematics studies at the age of 11. Likewise, children who received high quality ECEC score highly on in evaluations of social and emotional skills, such as self-regulation and pro-social behavior, at the age of 11.

In addition to the above, Project STAR, in the US, has demonstrated that children taught by teachers who have more than 10 years of experience

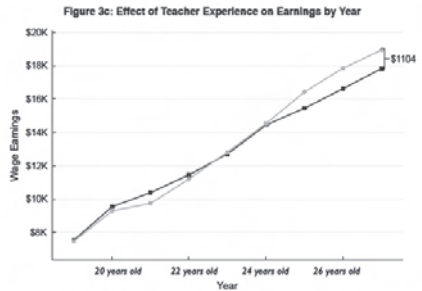
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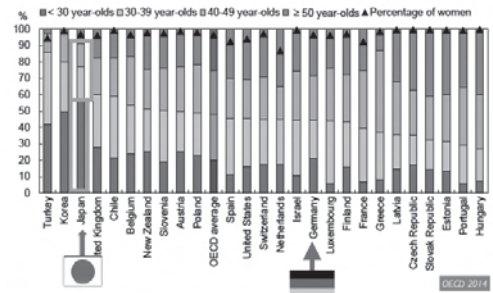
earn an average of \$1,104 more annually at the age of 27 than those not taught by such teachers (Cherry, R., Friedman, J., Hilger, N., Saez, E., Schanzenbach, D., & Yagan, D. 2011). We can understand that children taught by veteran teachers benefit from their positive influence on the development of social and emotional skills, and that these benefits are reflected later on, in the workplace. However, in Japan, teachers under the age of 30 (who, by definition have fewer than 10 years' experience) account for about 55% of all teachers. In addition, there is no evidence in Japan concerning the relationship between the quality of ECEC and children's development.

### 3. What makes for “quality” ECEC?

We cannot define ECEC quality conclusively, because the quality of ECEC depends on its social and cultural contexts. ECEC quality can be seen as

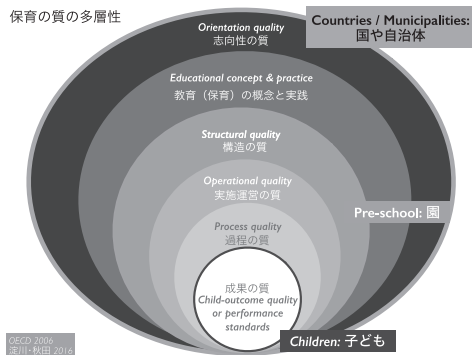


保育経験年数10年以上の保育者に育てられた子どもの方が、10年未満の保育者に育てられた子どもより、27歳時点で年収が\$1,104高い



しかしながら、日本は、20代（保育経験年数10年未満）の保育者が全体の約55%を占めている

encompassing all of the features of children's environments and experiences that are assumed to benefit their well-being. Further, ECEC quality is structured in a multilayered way. The first layer is the orientation quality. This is the direction or goal of the ECEC provided. The second layer is the educational concept and practice, such as a national curriculum. The third layer refers to structural quality, such as facility size and the conditions provided, the adult-to-child ratio, and so on. The fourth layer refers to operational quality, such as faculty teamwork or teachers' professional development discussions within their facility. The fifth layer relates to processes. These are the interactions among teachers and children, children and each other, their materials, environment, and activities. The sixth layer relates to child outcome quality or performance standards. The physical and mental growth of children guaranteed... Yes or No..



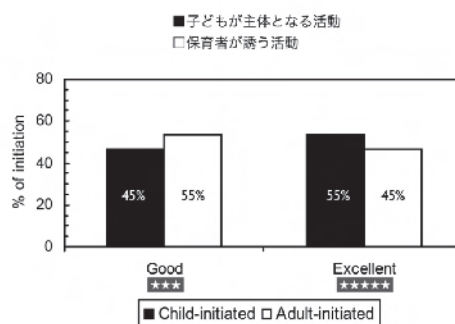
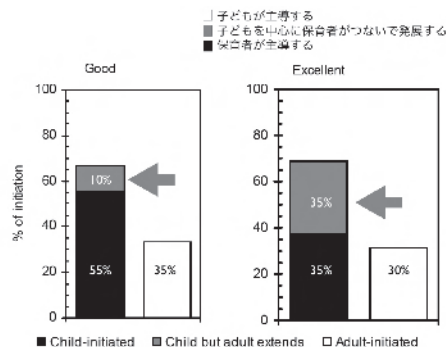
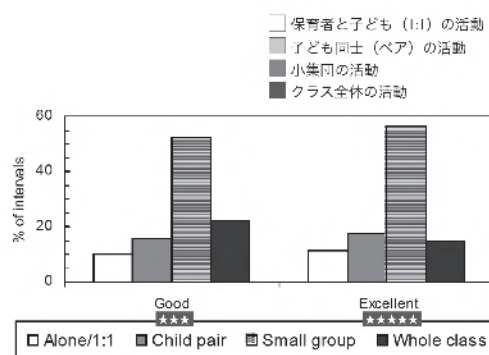
#### 4. The characteristics of high quality ECEC

Studies showing the characteristics of high quality ECEC are lacking in Japan. Therefore, Japanese scholars often rely on UK or US studies. Here, I introduce one UK study (Siraj-Blatchford and Silva 2004). The researchers evaluated ECEC quality in 141 facilities (high quality, medium quality, and low quality) and identified several characteristics of high and medium quality schools. (1) Both child- and adult-initiated activities are important, and striking a balance between them is one of the characteristics of high and medium quality ECEC. (2) In high and medium quality ECEC environments, small group activities are emphasized. (3) Advanced but achievable, challenging experiences are hallmarks of high and medium quality ECEC. (4) In high and medium quality ECEC, interaction like child but adult extends is done.

#### 5. The characteristics of high quality ECEC in Hiroshima, Japan

I will introduce the video clip entitled, “Play Makes Us Human.” This video was made at the Kaede Kindergarten, in Hiroshima, in a class for 5-year-olds. I hope that you can see the four types of high quality ECEC characteristics in action. You can watch this video clip on YouTube (<https://bangkok.unesco.org/content/play-makes-us-human-japan>).

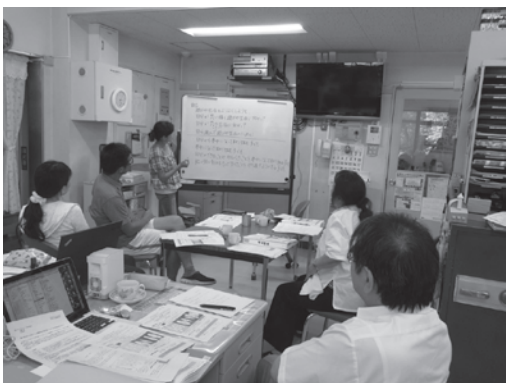
This video depicts an “innovative” approach that reflects the Kaede Kindergarten’s firm conviction that children develop through play; indeed, “play makes children human.” Through the “tower building” competition documented here, children at Kaede Kindergarten (facilitated by their



teachers) are encouraged to engage in learning that promotes autonomy, creativity, cooperation, and collaboration (UNESCO 2015).

#### 6. The devices to improve the quality of ECEC in Japan

The quality of Japanese ECEC is mainly rooted in our processes. The assessment scales for ECEC quality developed in Western countries have been translated into Japanese (e.g. Harms & Clifford 1980; Harms, Clifford & Cryer 1998; Harms, Clifford, & Cryer 2005; Harms, Clifford & Cryer 2015; Laevers 2005; Siraj, Kingston & Melhuish 2015). SICS is used as a tool to discuss with colleagues about each teacher’s understanding of the children (Laevers 2005).



Traditionally in Japan, ECEC quality has been improved through discussions with colleagues. This corresponds to operational quality, where teachers talk with colleagues and refer to specific episodes or documentation from the children. Talking with colleagues can also involve using videos, white boards, sticky notes, and photos (中坪 2018) .

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