

Research on Childcare Support for Foreign Parents in Preschool Institutions

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Abstract

Increasing number of foreign children in Japan's preschool facilities and the complexity of the problems faced by foreign families are becoming more and more apparent. The social situation of high support needs for foreign parents and the lack of necessarily adequate childcare support for foreign parents, and the existing "Guidelines for Kindergarten Education (2018)," "Childcare Guidelines for Nursery Schools (2018)." "And "Guidelines for Certified Nursery School Education and Childcare (2018)," describe childcare support that foreign parents cannot access directly. And In the field of preschool education practice, there is a lack of sufficient research accumulation and support for the actual situation. In other words, there is a need to find more specific ways to support foreign parents in preschool facilities. The survey method consisted of individual, semi-structured interviews, which were analyzed using Steps for Coding and Theorization (Ootani 2019). The results obtained are broadly classified into four perspectives and the discussion and conclusions are drawn from each perspective. In conclusion, the first point is an environment that facilitates the participation of foreign parents in the activities of preschool facilities; the second is support for the problems that foreign parents have; the third is support for the creation of materials and provision of information that concretely convey tacit knowledge of manners and etiquette. The third point is to support the creation of materials and provision of information that convey tacit knowledge of manners and manners in a concrete manner.

Keywords

childcare support; foreign parents; steps for Coding and theorization; qualitative data analysis; language barriers



I. Introduction

The purpose of this study was to analyze childcare support needed for foreign parents to use preschool facilities. The reasons for setting the theme of this study are as follows: First, foreign parents require high social support. Second, child-rearing support for foreign parents is insufficient. Third, although an environment has been created in which foreign parents with infant children can receive sufficient support to raise their children, there has not been a sufficient accumulation of research and support in line with the actual conditions in the field of preschool education.

Therefore, clarifying what kind of child-rearing support foreign parents require of caregivers and how to provide it will offer new knowledge on child-rearing support for foreign parents in preschool facilities and will contribute to research on child-rearing support for foreign parents, child-rearing support in preschool facilities, and child-rearing support in Japan.

In this study, "foreign parenting family" refers to a family in which both or one of the parents is a foreign national, a family in which the parents were born in Japan but grew up in a foreign country, or a family in which the parents have some roots in a foreign country and raise an infant before entering elementary school. The "child-rearing support" in this study is defined as support for child-rearing and refers to services that provide necessary information and advice in response to consultations with parents on various issues related to child-rearing, or services that provide necessary information and advice to their children.

II. Review of Literature

2.1 Defining information- Current Status of Foreign Residents

The Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act (hereinafter referred to as the Immigration Control Act), which was revised in 1990, has led to an increase in the number of foreign residents, from 2,121,831 at the end of FY 2014 to 2,933,137 at the end of FY 2019, a number that would have increased by more than 800,000 over the next five years until the new coronavirus in 2020 caused a major social upheaval. The number of preschool children has also increased from 91,595 in 2012 to 129, 613 in 2019 (Ministry of Justice, 2021). This indicates that the number of foreign families raising children is increasing.

2.2 Second academic discussion: Current situation of foreign families raising children

Difficulties in raising children by foreign families have been highlighted in the fields of education, maternal and child health, and welfare. Some foreign parents feel that they have been treated unfairly, such as being treated like children by the caregivers or being spoken to in a quick manner. In addition, during the childbearing period, they may experience differences in medical systems related to childbirth, such as pain care and nutritional intake, and in childcare, they may have difficulties understanding discipline and events (Minamino, 2017). Furthermore, Ueno (2003) also argues from a language clinical perspective that having support is important for foreign parents living in Japan because as their children learn Japanese, they may feel that their values learned from their mother tongue have been denied.

a. Third Directional discussion: Support for Foreign Parents in Pre-School Facilities

Chapter 4, Section 3 of the "Guidelines for the Education and Care of Preschool and Child Care in Partnership with Authorized Child Care Centers," published by the Cabinet Office (2018), provides a comprehensive perspective on the various needs of parents attending an authorized childcare center. Since foreign families raising children have different cultures and lifestyles in their native countries, childcare support may differ somewhat between Japanese and foreign parents. Therefore, all child-rearing support in the same section, except for the support for foreign families with social difficulties in Section 3.7, is considered difficult to utilize and implement for foreign parents.

As described above, the increase in the number of foreign preschoolers and the complexity of the problems faced by foreign families are becoming increasingly apparent in current preschool facilities. Therefore, it is necessary to seek more concrete ways to support foreign parents utilizing preschool facilities.

III. Research Method

The survey method used was individual, semi-structured interviews. The conditions for selecting survey collaborators for this study were (1) "foreign parents" and (2) "children attending or having graduated from a preschool facility," and 7 individuals who met the two conditions and resided in Ibaraki, Saitama, Tokyo, Gunma, and Osaka Prefectures were selected as survey collaborators. Seven persons were selected as survey collaborators. In order to secure survey collaborators, we asked foreign parents who met the conditions at the certified preschools operated by the author and the preschool directors of member preschools of the Japan Association for the Education of Young Children, to which the author belongs, to cooperate in the survey and select survey collaborators, and selected foreign parents who met the conditions at each pre-school facility and asked for their cooperation in the survey.

IV. Result and Discussion

4.1 The Details of the Data Reading

The interview data obtained from this survey were transcribed verbatim and analyzed by Steps for Coding and Theorization to create a storyline of "problems faced" and "support sought," summarized by viewpoint

Table 1. Summary of survey collaborators

Name	Sex	Nationality	Age	Duration of stay (years)	Family composition	Age of child
Ms. A	female	Pakistan	38	6	father, mother, 2 children	8, 6
Ms. B	female	Philippines	38	22	father, mother, 3 children	8, 4, 1
Ms. C	female	China	31	8	father, mother, 1 child	7
Mr. D	male	India	49	20	father, mother, 2 children	18, 8
Mr. E	male	Pakistan	46	10	father, mother, grandfather, grandmother, 2 children	14, 7
Ms. F	female	Pakistan	35	5	father, mother, 3 children	10, 7, 2
Ms. G	female	Kyrgyzstan	39	7	father, mother, 3 children	12, 9, 7

a. The evidence from the message

- 1) Storyline of "Support for mutual understanding between preschool facilities and foreign parents, and support for parental participation in activities" that integrates individual storylines

Foreign parents are confused by the Japanese event culture that they do not have in their home country, and they have difficulty understanding school events because they do not have a sufficient mutual understanding with the preschool facility. They do not know what to do at field day events, such as parent-child competitions. Some foreign parents have an abstract understanding of the purpose and aim of large-scale events but have the same difficulty in understanding Japanese cultural activities as the former group for small-scale activities such as the Hinamatsuri (Girls' Festival) and evening tea ceremonies. As for the support requested, there were some requests for "event explanation materials," but overall, there were many requests for "opportunities to explain events on an individual basis."

- 2) Storyline of "Individual support related to development and child-rearing anxiety" that integrates individual storylines

While foreign parents are concerned about their children's low Japanese conversation skills and their children's ability to communicate with caregivers, there are also cases where parents are concerned about their children's English language skills acquired through English education in early childhood. Foreign parents who were concerned about their children's developmental Japanese language ability requested language support at the preschool facility at the beginning of group life, and English-speaking caregivers were requested to be stationed at the preschool facility because they felt that the presence of English-speaking caregivers would alleviate their developmental concerns.

- 3) Storyline of "Language Barrier in Supporting Foreign Parents" integrating individual storylines

Foreign parents have difficulty communicating in Japanese with childcare providers, making it difficult for them to explain their child-rearing problems to providers. Many foreign parents find it difficult to understand Japanese letters sent from preschool facilities. They are aware of their low level of Japanese conversation skills but also point to the low level of English conversation skills of their caregivers.

Many foreign parents have trouble understanding the meaning of the letters written in Japanese, so they require support, such as [multilingual translation of documents], [writing in furigana] (phonetic alphabet), [multilingualization of event explanatory materials], and [illustrations in explanatory materials]. In particular, since English is a universal language, there are calls for "translating letters into English" and "creating English translations of pamphlets and other documents."

- 4) Storylines of "cultural barriers in supporting foreign parents" that integrates individual storylines

Foreign parents have many concerns about religion and the inability to provide halal meals at preschool facilities. They are worried about their children eating food that is different from the food around them, and the lack of a guaranteed food temperature. They also face difficulties in maintaining Islamic religious activities because there are no restaurants in the area that serve halal food. They also pointed out that it is difficult to teach them how to use chopsticks at home.

As for the support they seek, foreign parents do not know how to hold chopsticks properly and find it difficult to teach their children how to use them. In addition, Japanese parents can use the school lunch provided by the preschool facility, but in the case of religious meals, foreign parents find it difficult to prepare lunch early in the morning, so we have requested [provision of religious meals] as support.

4.2 Discussion

The results of this survey revealed the following four points: 1) need for mutual understanding between preschool facilities and foreign parents and support for parental participation in activities, 2) individual support related to development and child-rearing concerns, 3) support for foreign parents to overcome language barriers, and 4) support for foreign parents to overcome cultural barriers. Finally, we discuss the type of support that is effective.

1) Need for mutual understanding between preschool facilities and foreign parents, and support for parental participation in activities

Some foreign parents are often confused by the Japanese event culture that they do not have in their home country, experience difficulty in understanding Japanese cultural activities and school events, and are less willing to participate in events. According to Ishikawa (2010), foreign children born in Japan are sometimes brought up in the culture of their home country, including conversations using their native language. It is thought that foreign parents often use preschool facilities without having the opportunity to learn about Japanese cultural activities.

Overall, there are many requests to explain events on an individual basis, especially detailed oral explanations. This suggests that, in addition to responding to foreign parents in a manner that is not similar to that of Japanese parents, childcare providers need to provide oral explanations rather than written communication such as letters.

2) Individual support related to developmental and child-rearing concerns

According to Minamino (2021), the stress and difficulties faced by parents of children with disabilities with foreign roots include mental dissatisfaction related to their children's acceptance of their disabilities, difficulties in accessing and using public support, and stress related to gender and culture. In this study, foreign parents of children with intellectual disabilities also reported emotional distress related to their children's development and experienced difficulties in raising their children without knowing about the temporary childcare system at preschool facilities.

3) Language barriers in providing support to foreign parents

In this survey, we found that many foreign parents had difficulty understanding Japanese-language documents in the form of letters sent to them from preschool facilities. They are aware of their low Japanese conversation skills, while also pointing out the low English conversation skills of their childcare providers. Hoshina (2020) states that it is necessary for public elementary and junior high schools to provide foreign parents with information about the Japanese educational system and support system for their children. However, even at preschool facilities, caregivers need to provide support, such as translating documents into multiple languages and writing furigana in Japanese. However, there is also a need to improve the spoken English levels of Japanese caregivers because of the difficulty in communicating on a day-to-day basis.

4) Cultural barriers to providing support to foreign parents

Minamino (2017) stated that because of the large regional differences in the areas where foreigners are concentrated, educational facilities and social resources based on their own culture are limited and subject to other restrictions. However, in this survey, foreign parents with religious beliefs tended to be troubled by the fact that preschool facilities generally do not support religious food and lack educational facilities related to local religions. Therefore, they are anxious about their children being placed in an environment unique to foreign infants and worried that they will not be able to adapt to Japanese meal preparation methods. Therefore, creating an atmosphere that welcomes foreign children and educating foreign preschoolers on meal preparation will indirectly support foreign parents.

V. Conclusion

In terms of support to foreign parents at preschool facilities, 1) for "Need for mutual understanding between preschool facilities and foreign parents and support for parental participation in activities," in addition to providing group or individual support to foreign parents, daycare providers should provide written communication such as letters during activities and events to foreign parents, with oral explanations for mutual understanding. Additionally, provide support for parental participation in developmental and child-rearing concerns. 2) For "individual support related to the development and child-rearing concerns," daycare providers should inform foreign parents about their children's daily activity and development and set up regular meetings to discuss child-rearing. 3) With regard to "support for foreign parents/guardians to overcome language barriers," when daycare providers contact foreign parents/guardians, they should translate documents into multiple languages, write furigana, etc., and make efforts to improve their spoken English language skills. 4) With regard to "supporting foreign parents to overcome cultural barriers," it is necessary to create an atmosphere that welcomes foreign children in the classroom and educates foreign preschoolers on meal preparation.

a. Theoretical Contributions

The significance of this study is twofold.

First, this study was designed to clarify the childcare support required of childcare providers for foreign parents from each of four perspectives. This study obtained raw narratives from interviews with foreign parents and newly clarified the child-rearing support required of childcare providers, which led to the identification of specific measures for providing the support sought by childcare providers to foreign parents.

In addition, in terms of child-rearing support for foreign parents, the number of studies targeting foreign parents who are using or have used preschool facilities in recent years is small, so this study provided new findings in the research on child-rearing support for foreign parents at preschool facilities.

b. Limitations and Further Research Directions

The following points are limitations of this study.

First, the recommendations for child-rearing support practices presented in this study were not based on a survey of the changes in the relationship with childcare providers and in child-rearing at home as a result of the actual implementation of these practices with foreign parents. Future research should be conducted to determine how effective each practice is.

Second, this study only surveyed foreign parents to find out what kind of childcare support they wanted from their childcare providers, so it was not possible to interview the childcare providers in depth about their childcare practices. Therefore, it is necessary to examine childcare support that can be provided by childcare providers.

In the future, the number of foreign children will increase in Japan, and child-rearing support for foreign parents will be required. The author would like to continue his research on child-rearing support by conducting surveys to determine how effective the newly proposed child-rearing support would be in actual child-rearing practices, and to what extent child-rearing support is possible from the side of childcare providers.

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