

Japan

Country Overview

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Country name

Japan

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Introduction

Japan has several initiatives regarding social and emotional learning (SEL) in early childhood education and care (ECEC) settings, although finding SEL interventions for the ECEC context is difficult. There are state initiatives along with several research institutes advocating the development of social and emotional skills in children. Practitioners have many ways of assessing these skills. There are interventions available, though this is predominantly for school-aged children.

Development

There are several organisations in Japan that are actively involved with research and development of SEL in ECEC on a national level. For instance, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) accommodates the National Institute for Educational Policy Research (NIER). NIER in turn houses departments that are relevant for the development of SEL in Japan, primarily the Early Childhood Education Research Center. In addition to federal initiatives and universities, there are also privately funded research institutes. There is the Benesse Education Research and Development Institute, who conduct their own research and development, while also supporting other institutes, such as Child Research Net, a non-profit, Internet-based child research institute in Japan. There are also several academic societies that may support and disseminate relevant research rather than directly develop practices, such as the Japanese Educational Research Association, Japanese Society of Child Science and Japan Society of Developmental Psychology.

Assessment

There are several initiatives regarding the assessment of SEL on a national level in Japan (Kyllonen, 2017). Regarding ECEC, the previously mentioned Early Childhood and Education Research Center is currently undertaking a project aiming to assess social- and emotional skills through questionnaires and interviews (NIER, n.d.).

It is unclear which methods and to what degree practitioners formally assess social and emotional learning or skills in ECEC. However, there are several tools that have been used in research, specifically in Japanese ECEC. One example is the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment-Mini (DESSA-mini) for universal screening of social and emotional competencies rated by teachers (Naglieri, LeBuffe & Shapiro, 2011). DESSA-mini was recently translated for a Japanese study involving children from 4 to 5 years of age (Miyamura, Isumi & Fujiwara, 2021). Another example of teacher-rated social and emotional competence in ECEC is the Social Competence and Behavior Evaluation Inventory (SCBE-30) that was used in a large multinational study which included Japan (LaFreniere et al., 2002).

Practitioners might also opt to use a parent rating scale. One such example is the Japanese version of the Infant-Toddler Social and Emotional Assessment (J-ITSEA) that can be used as a parent questionnaire for children from 1 to 3 years of age (Yago et al., 2015). Additionally, the Brief Infant Toddler Social Emotional Assessment (BITSEA) has also been translated to a Japanese version for similar use (Nakamichi et al., 2022).

While not exclusively a tool for assessing social and emotional skills, the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) is available in Japanese (Youth in Mind, 2020).

Intervention

Japan has several explicit SEL programmes available for a large age span (Ikesako & Miyamoto, 2015). While this also includes younger children, such as first graders (e.g. Matsumoto, Ishimoto & Takizawa, 2020), finding SEL interventions for the ECEC context is difficult.

When comparing integrated practices, one example that may stand out as different compared to Western approaches is Mimamoru; an approach where educators intentionally observe but withhold immediate intervention in a conflict situations to foster autonomous development of interpersonal problem-solving skills (Nakatsubo, Ueda & Kayama, 2021). This practice, and similar, that are considered as listening, empathising and sharing control with children can be viewed as child-centred attitudes. However, this factor did not seem to significantly contribute to parent-rated social-emotional competence in a recent study, though it did contribute to a significant decrease on the problem subscale (Nakamichi et al., 2022).

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