

Childcare Professional Training for Non-native Students in Japan: From the Perspective of Multicultural Education

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1. Introduction

The transition towards a multicultural society has been progressing in Japan due to the increase in the foreign population (Sato 2019). There has been a growing need to address the needs of children and parents with roots in overseas countries who attend childcare facilities such as kindergartens and nurseries. Additionally, for Japanese children, exposure to a multicultural society during their early years can foster acceptance of diversity and inclusivity. Therefore, the implementation of multicultural education in childcare facilities is necessary (Sasaki 2020).

However, as indicated by the OECD (2018), childcare professionals in Japan have shown lower interest in cultural diversity compared to those in other countries, highlighting the need for improvements in multicultural training. The lack of diversity among childcare providers hinders opportunities for children to learn about diversity and multicultural coexistence. Childcare professionals whose native language is not Japanese can facilitate communication with children and parents who do not speak Japanese, and they can promote multicultural coexistence. It is meaningful to increase the number of childcare professionals whose native language is not Japanese and who obtain childcare qualifications in Japan, but non-native students face significant barriers to studying in childcare training universities, practical training, and employment.

This study aims to identify their challenges and explore the support that a childcare worker training college can provide in terms of classes, practical training, and job placement support.

2. Method

Semi-structured interviews, conducted in Japanese, were held with three students enrolled in a childcare worker training college who do not have Japanese as their native language. These interviews were conducted using an online conferencing application shared among the first author and co-researchers, with an average interview duration of approximately 65 minutes. Topics covered included (1) background information: pre-enrollment situations, (2) academic experiences within childcare training universities, (3) experiences during practical training, (4) job placement support, and (5) the situation of non-native childcare providers in Japan. The interviews were structured to encourage participants' free discussion and avoid strict question-and-answer formats. Interviews were conducted and recorded using an IC recorder with consent.

The primary focus of this study is the narrative data obtained from the interviews, supplemented by interviewer notes. Narrative data were categorized into subheadings based on the context of the narrators and relevant excerpts were extracted for each research topic. Commonalities and recurring themes identified across multiple stories were integrated into categories. Attention to detail was given when identifying commonalities to ensure the contextual meaning and nuances of co-researchers' narratives were preserved.

Ethical considerations were given the highest priority in interviews and analysis, following the regulations of the researchers' organization.

3. Results

We revealed that participants faced the following main challenges.

Prior to enrollment, students who do not speak Japanese as their mother tongue would benefit from knowing specific information about how to receive support after enrollment for smoother academic progress. After enrollment, they experienced difficulty mastering the subject material due to a lack of understanding of specialized terms and kanji characters used in Japanese early childhood education. Individual and incremental learning approaches, such as allowing report submissions in English, providing furigana (phonetic script) for kanji characters in exam papers, and extending exam time, were effective. Additionally, it became clear that there is a lack of opportunities for informal network building.

In their practical training, they found it difficult to use specialized terminology and kanji, as well as write a diary and submit their own impressions every day. In addition, they were sometimes unsure of which language to use when communicating with children who are not good at speaking Japanese. They watched how foreign children who did not speak Japanese were having trouble communicating with their childcare workers and friends, and how they felt relieved when they talked with the students in Vietnamese or English.

Regarding job placement, it became evident that understanding the complex and diverse types of childcare facilities in Japan and their hiring systems was challenging for these students. Another challenge was that it was unclear whether there was a culture among staff to accept foreign colleagues, as they were actively recruiting foreign childcare professionals.

4. Conclusion

This research discusses methods to provide educational support necessary for foreign students in Japan to obtain childcare qualifications and contribute to a multicultural society through their professions. This study showed that explaining the way of support to non-native students before enrollment leads to smooth academic progress after enrollment and that it is useful to consider an effective step-by-step approach in each area, such as on-campus classes, exams, and building friendships after enrollment. It is also important to provide opportunities for informal network building.

During practical training, it is effective for the teachers at the childcare training college to inform the childcare facility in advance about each student's individual situation and provide support for the students in maintaining training diaries. Furthermore, both during their practical training and subsequent employment, it is crucial to recognize that a diverse team of childcare workers, including non-native foreign childcare professionals, contributes to multicultural coexistence within childcare facilities and has a positive impact on children, parents, and childcare staff. It is suggested that teachers at training universities could play a role in promoting this understanding.

< Main References >

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