

A study on Childcare quality: ZAP terakoya (Cambodia) and one of Okayama's private daycare center (Japan)

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In Japan today, the number of children using day-care centers and after-school children's clubs are rapidly increasing due to the increasing number of working parents and nuclear families. While the quantity of childcare is expanding in order to reduce the number of children on waiting lists, there are concerns about the decline in the quality of childcare. Nursery schools and after-school children's clubs need parents' participation to improve the quality of childcare. In this paper, we first summarize and discuss the current educational and occupational labor conditions in Cambodia. Then, based on interviews with parents who attend licensed nursery schools in Japan, we explored the current situation and challenges of parental participation in childcare. As a result, it was found that it is important to improve the staff and childcare workers' skills to have a better quality of childcare.

Keywords: Quality of Child Care, Parents, After-School Children's Club, Cambodia

I. Introduction

Due to the increase in the number of working parents and nuclear families in Japan today, the number of children using day-care centers and after-school children's clubs has been increasing rapidly. However, due to the shortage of nursery teachers and support staff, there are still many children on waiting lists. In April 2015, the new childcare support system was launched. In April 2015, the new system for supporting child-rearing started, with the principle of "supporting child-rearing by society as a whole in terms of both quantity and quality" ⁽¹⁾. In order to reduce the number of children on waiting lists, the

establishment of nursery schools and the securing of nursery teachers are urgently needed, and the resolution of problems regarding the treatment of nursery teachers is considered to be the first priority. However, Ikemoto (2018) discusses concerns about the decline in the quality of childcare while the quantity of childcare is expanding ⁽²⁾.

With regard to after-school children's clubs, Ikemoto (2018) states that "there are no national guidelines on how to conduct audits of after-school children's clubs, and it is completely up to local governments to take action" ⁽³⁾, and that the lack of third-party evaluations and the fact that only half of the clubs conduct self-evaluations have raised concerns about the decline in the quality of childcare. Moreover, Yabuki (2015) stated that the lack of third-party evaluations and the fact that only half of them conduct self-evaluations have raised concerns about the

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deterioration of childcare quality. He further states that school childcare has developed as a “collaborative childcare space” for working parents who protect “the right of parents to work” and “the right of children to grow and develop.”⁽³⁾ “Parents felt that even if they wanted a day-care center or wanted to make it better, there was no way to make it happen.”⁽⁴⁾ and⁽⁵⁾, “In this age of child-rearing difficulties, there is a need for the ‘collaborative child-rearing’ that school-age childcare centers offer.”⁽⁵⁾, stating the need for parents to improve childcare.

Then, what do parents think about “quality”? As one of the reasons why “ensuring the quality of childcare is important,” Ueeda and Oishi (2003) found that “the more highly educated and fully employed the parents are, and the longer they need to care for their children, the stronger their commitment to the quality of childcare”⁽⁶⁾.⁽⁶⁾ In addition, Ikemoto (2014) focuses on parental involvement in childcare in developed countries and describes its importance and potential based on an international comparison⁽⁷⁾. Regarding after-school children’s clubs, Matsumura and Nonaka (2014) conducted an international comparison with the aim of developing after-school children’s clubs⁽⁸⁾.

On the other hand, In Cambodia, the concept of national childcare (daycare) is still rare. However, many of the families of the manufacturing industry staff who support the Cambodian economy have both parents working, and some companies have introduced private school childcare as a welfare program for their factories.

This paper will first summarize the current educational and occupational labor situation in Cambodia, and then examine the educational and occupational labor situation in Cambodia through the case study of the Terakoya program of ZAP ZEAL ASPIRATION PARTNER ASIA CO. We will also examine the situation of education and vocational labor in Cambodia. In addition, based on interviews with parents who attend licensed nursery schools in Japan, we will discuss the current situation and challenges of parental participation in childcare.

II. School Child Care in Cambodia

Cambodia’s economy

Cambodia has been experiencing a strong and high economic growth rate of around 7% real GDP growth every year. The real GDP increased from US\$5.9 billion in 2000 to US\$22.2 billion in 2018, an almost fourfold increase. As a result, domestic labor costs have risen rapidly, and the minimum wage in the garment and footwear industry has increased from US\$60 per month in 2012 to US\$192 in 2021. The minimum wage is applied only to the sewing and shoe manufacturing industries. It is customary for manufacturing industries in other sectors to follow suit⁽⁹⁾.

Although the economic growth is expected to slow down in the near future due to the Corona disaster, it is believed that the country will continue to achieve sustainable economic growth in the medium to long term. According to the National Strategic Development Plan (NSDP 2019-2023), Cambodia aims to become an upper-middle-income country by 2030 and a developed country / high-income country by 2050⁽¹⁰⁾. This paper begins with a discussion of Cambodia’s current situation.

Wage situation in Cambodia

The median worker and monthly basic salary for Japanese manufacturers in Cambodia is \$183 in FY2019. Currently, the minimum wage in Cambodia is set at US\$192 in 2021, but this is only for the sewing and shoe manufacturing industries, and is not enforceable for other occupations. The average wage in the non-manufacturing industry is US\$501 for general staff and US\$150-250 for store staff, according to the data⁽¹¹⁾, but it seems that there are few Japanese SMEs that pay more than US\$500 for general staff.⁽¹¹⁾ However, there are probably few Japanese SMEs that pay more than US\$500 for general staff. The data is prepared by Mizuho Bank from JETRO materials, and there are many Japanese small and medium-sized enterprises that are not included in the data.

In relation, the average wage of the Nikkei Security Company, a friend of the author’s, is US\$130 in Phnom Penh. Wages for café staff at local companies are also generally around

US\$150, and it is rare to hear of wages above the minimum wage. In the Andong area around ZAP's office, there are many households with a monthly income of less than US\$100.

Population situation in Cambodia

As of 2020, Cambodia has a total fertility rate of 2.5%, a population of over 16 million, and a population that has been growing by 1.5% for the past 10 years. The average life expectancy is young at 25.6 years, and the population is expected to exceed 21 million in the next 30 years until 2050.

Cambodia's Education System

The school system in Cambodia is similar to that in Japan, with a 6-3-3-4 system, and the compulsory education period is from 6 to 14 years old (6 years of elementary school and 3 years of junior high school). The school year is usually from October to July of the following year, with summer vacation in August and September. Classes are held either in the morning or in the afternoon, but some students attend private cram schools after school to make up for the extra study time, or are tutored by teachers from the same school for a fee. In both cases, considering the 100 USD poor families around ZAP, it may be difficult for them to invest their own money in education.

Cambodia's School Enrollment Rate

The Constitution of Cambodia stipulates that children must receive nine years of compulsory education, but the enrollment rate in elementary school is about 69%, and about 17% in secondary school. In rural areas in particular, where children are a valuable source of labor, many children do not attend enough days of compulsory education to stay in school.

In terms of compulsory education enrollment, about 69% of children aged 6 to 11 are enrolled in elementary school (primary education). In junior high school (early secondary education), the enrollment rate is about 17% for ages 12 to 14. In terms of post-compulsory education, there are approximately 360 high schools throughout Cambodia, and the number of students enrolled in

these schools in 2016 was approximately 20% of the school-age population. There are no statistics on university (higher education) enrollment rates, but it is generally estimated to be around 0.7 to 1.0%⁽¹²⁾.

Although I could not confirm the correlation data between the rate of enrollment in higher education and self-affirmation by the time of this paper, in my experience, there are many more people who have graduated from elementary school or junior high school who have low self-affirmation and lack self-confidence. On the other hand, those who have graduated from famous universities or foreign universities often have higher self-confidence.

Cambodia's School Childcare

The National Policy on Early Childhood Care and Development was enshrined in the 2010 NP-ECCD, and Cambodian provinces are beginning to put more institutional emphasis on pre-school education, with each province responsible for providing 2-3-hour sessions per day of pre-school education for children between the ages of 3 and 6. As of 2018, there are 186 state kindergartens and 600 state accredited community kindergartens in Cambodia.

Cambodia School Child Care PTCCC's Full-Day Child Care (School Child Care)

The PreyTatouch Community Childcare Center (PTCCC), a community kindergarten located in BeungKhyang Commune, Kandal Province, is one of the few, or as of 2018, the only, full-day childcare center in Cambodia.

The PTCCC was established in 1992 by a non-governmental organization called Caring for Young Khmer (CYK) and was transferred to the Commune Council in 2017; in 2018, the center was one of 600 accredited community kindergartens, with teachers receiving the appropriate monthly stipend from the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MoEYS). The center serves a total of about 30 children between the ages of 3 and 5 years old whose parents are considered economically poor. The number of children per day is about three to four, and on the busiest days it can be more than ten⁽¹³⁾.

Background of ZAP

ZAP was established in 2017 with the mission of providing employment to adults and education to children. Over the past four years, the company has hired more than 30 Cambodians, mainly through its BPO business, and has donated more than US\$1 million and invested in educational development. From 2020 onwards, the office will be moved to the Andong district, which is said to be the largest slum in Phnom Penh, and new staff will be hired directly from within the district. In addition, the office on the first floor has been opened as a temple school where children can come and go as they please. The reason for this is that, under ZAP's mission as mentioned above, the company aims to earn cash income in poor areas and expand education in low education areas, especially in the field of IoT education.

Zap employment system and its Terakoya program

ZAP has narrowed down the hiring staff from 2020 to be from the poor areas around the office, so there are many potential staff who have never touched a computer before. However, as the operation center and AI annotation work will be the main tasks, a certain level of understanding of computers will be required. This is where the ZAP Operation and Terakoya System comes into play.

One of the most unique features of ZAP's Terakoya is that five laptop computers and four desktop computers have been installed to create an environment where children who come to the Terakoya can learn and interact with computers while playing at any time.

The staff candidates play with the children at the Terakoya and start by educating the children. While playing with the children, the candidates are able to touch the computers as part of that process and learn naturally, eliminating the resistance to computers and lowering the hurdle to working.

In addition, children can easily enter the temple as a full-time childcare place from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Parents can not only focus on their own work, but can also grow up with the Internet while being in a poor area. And, without even knowing it, they are able to be in

an environment where they can come into contact with the cutting-edge technology of AI projects.

Potential staff members can learn the basics of how to turn on a computer and search the Internet while playing with the children. In addition, when they complete tasks such as mastering computer typing, setting up a YouTube account, and setting up Google Drive, they are rewarded with fruit and meal assistance. The main task of the candidate staff here is to take care of the children and learn the computer area while playing. By doing this, the staff candidates can earn 8 US dollars a day, about 190-200 US dollars a month. It also allows them to play and have fun while learning the computer. Once they are comfortable with computers and have acquired a certain level of skills, they can be officially hired as staff if they wish. The monthly salary will start at about 250 US dollars. However, it has been about a year since the start of the experimental recruitment, and although we have received a total of 10 staff candidates, we have yet to officially hire new staff. The reason for the lack of new staff is still ambiguous, as it has only been about a year. However, in Cambodia, many people say that the reason for working is to eat rice, so-called rice work. Therefore, if there is a situation where they can survive without achieving what we are looking for, we can assume that they will not take on the next challenge. We would like to set up further discussions with potential staff members and continue to improve how we can make them want to take on the challenge.

ZAP aims to be a place where children can visit whenever they want from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., where parents can take care of their children on a full-time basis, and where ZAP can secure and train human resources at a low cost, but I am reminded that investment in education requires time.

III A Current Situation of Childcare with Parental Involvement

In this section, we interviewed parents who send their children to a private, licensed daycare center in Okayama City, Okayama Prefecture.

Nursery school attended

A nursery school in Okayama City, Okayama Prefecture. It is a licensed nursery school operated by a social welfare corporation. Children from 43 days old to preschool age are allowed to attend, and there is one class for each age group, with about 100 children.

Interviewee

The interviewee has two children, one 4 years old and the other 1 year old, who have been attending this preschool since they were 0 years old. Both parents work full-time.

Relationship between the preschool and the parents

The preschool has a parent-teacher association, and the parents of the families enrolled in the preschool and the staff who work there are members. Monthly membership fees are collected, and there are also general meetings and accounting audits. There are events organized by the parents' association, and the executive committee meets each time to hold the event. Specifically, there are summer festivals, school festivals, mochi pounding, and bazaars.

In addition to these events, the parents also assist in the management of the field day and clean the school with the teachers. There are many other events that require parents to go to the school in addition to dropping off and picking up their children. In addition to going to the school, there are other things to do: First of all, parents have to fill in a notebook designated by the preschool, which consists of 41 sheets of A4 for 0-year-olds and is designed to be filled in chronologically for 24 hours a day. The entries include what the child ate that day, bedtime and waking time, whether or not the child defecated, washed his/her face and brushed his/her teeth, and any help or events. Parents have to fill out the form in the midst of their busy schedules, and if they do not fill out the form, or if the preschool judges that the meals, assistance, or sleeping hours are not appropriate, they are instructed by the nursery staff, which is one of the reasons why they feel overwhelmed.

Moreover, children are instructed to make their own hand-sewn rags, mattresses for infants, patches for hats, backpacks, aprons, hand-me-downs, hand bags, pajama bags, cup holders, and ball holders. In some cases, parents are asked to make these items without telling their children, which can be quite a burden for parents who work full-time and have to buy fabric and cut down on sleep time. At the bazaar, parents are always required to display their handmade goods, which is also a burden.

And when it comes to events organized by the parents' association, all the parents have to participate, from the division of roles to preparation and cleanup. In the case of the field day, the event is organized by the preschool, but the parents are supposed to be in charge of the preparations, setting up the props, and cleaning up, so they are not able to see their children's efforts or share the aftermath with their children.

In such a situation, even if parents inform the preschool of their child's restlessness at home or reluctance to go to the preschool, there are many cases where the parents are not informed of the daily activities of the preschool, or there are no reports of injuries that occur at the preschool or are not shared among the caregivers, which leads to distrust. Parents often intervene in preschool events, but there are few occasions when parents express their feelings about the day-to-day care of their children. When asked why, some parents said, "I don't know anything about childcare," "I don't want to say something and have my child do something," "It's like having my child held hostage," and "I don't want to be identified. I don't want to be identified."

Problems and issues

I think there are two problems. The first is that the content of the childcare is not in line with the times. In an age when parents cannot provide the nursery schools and the necessary childcare environment for their children without the intervention of the government, we are no longer living in a time when we had to sell goods at bazaars and other events to raise funds, or when we had to make things by hand. Today, work schedules vary greatly from family to family,

with full-time work, third shift work, and night shifts, making it difficult for the preschool to give uniform instructions on what to produce and for families to participate in events. In addition, there are many parents whose sewing experience is limited to the level of home economics at school, and in an age where quality products can be purchased at affordable prices, is it appropriate to demand excessive handmade products?

Secondly, there is a decline in the quality of childcare workers. Even the basic practice of informing parents of what happens at the preschool does not improve, even after frequent interventions by parents and the government to point out the problem. In addition, there is a lack of understanding or communication of the intentions and aims of the preschool's traditional and customary activities and events, and young childcare workers feel that they are being "forced" to work with parents. In such a situation, the parents are introduced to the event management, and their opinions are sometimes strongly reflected. Parents do not always have the correct knowledge about childcare, so the content of the event may be determined solely by their thoughts. If the nursery teacher does not inform the parents of the aims, intentions, and safety of the program, the nursery teacher's expertise and duties may be abandoned, and the nature of the nursery, including the safety of the children and support for the parents, may be called into question. In addition, inappropriate use of language with parents has resulted in tokenistic events and misinformation being conveyed to them.

In order to solve this problem, the childcare staff themselves need to understand the purpose of the content and events. It is also necessary for the staff to work together to share information and raise the children together with the parents based on the correct expertise. In order to achieve this, first of all, childcare workers need to learn about childcare in which parents participate. In order to learn more about current childcare, we believe it is effective to participate in career development workshops and license renewal courses. On top of that, I think the issue for childcare workers is how to reach out to parents in a way and manner that allows them to work together for better

childcare.

For most parents, this is the first time to raise their children and the first time to go to daycare, so they do not have anything to compare or knowledge about childcare. Therefore, if they are told that it is "for their children's sake," they will do their best, but there needs to be a place where parents can express their difficulties in raising their children and going to daycare. Not only preschools, but also the government, local communities, universities, and other organizations with expertise in childcare need to provide parents with knowledge about childcare and a place where they can report their problems.

IV. General Discussion and Future Issues

From the case studies of after-school children's clubs in Cambodia and private nursery schools in Japan, it was found that the first thing that needs to be done is to improve the skills and knowledge of the staff. It is important for parents to participate in the content of after-school clubs and childcare for their children, as they are the ones who are responsible for raising their children and will be with them throughout their lives. However, how do we communicate and explain the contents of childcare to parents who have diverse upbringing histories and work in a variety of jobs, and how do we collaborate with them to raise their children? In order to achieve these goals, the most important issue is to improve the quality and abilities of the staff and childcare workers who work there, and it is urgent to think about and implement programs to achieve these goals. In order to do this, it is necessary to find out what is causing the decline in quality. By clarifying the causes, specific programs for quality improvement can be created. If there is a problem with salaries, funding and social status or improvement will be needed. It would also be important to interview and know the stance of the staff and childcare workers.

Along with improving the quality of staff and childcare workers, it is necessary to explore the childcare needs of parents in order to realize their participation in childcare. It is also necessary to provide a place where parents can

acquire knowledge about childcare and raise questions and concerns.

We would like to continue our research so that institutions that train staff and schools that train childcare professionals can not only improve the expertise and quality of their work, but also foster the participation and collaboration of parents.

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