

Teachers in Early Childhood Education and Care in Japan and South Africa: Current Circumstances with a Focus on Professional Teacher Identity

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Abstract

This research aims to clarify current ECEC circumstances in Japan and South Africa. And we also analyzed the data of interviews to Japanese new preschool teachers by GTA (Grounded Theory Approach). We study Japanese new preschool teachers' identity from viewpoints of Japan and South Africa. When we discuss from Japan, we want to refer South African circumstance.

In the Japanese system of early childhood education, there are three main but different types of facilities: nursery school, kindergarten, and center for early childhood education and care. And there are alternative types of ECEC services with public financial aid, such as taking care of infants at her home. Preschool teachers are trained at four-year colleges and universities, and at two year colleges.

Since South Africa has just launched the Policy on Minimum Requirements for Programmes Leading to Qualifications in Higher Education for ECEC Educators- PLMRP (2017), the findings in the study has enhanced the programme development for the new BEd (Bachelor of Education) (ECEC).

As conclusion of analyzing of GTA, we made it clear that forging the identity of new teachers of early childhood education in Japan happens through cooperation with other teachers on actual jobs. They hold a positive image of preschool teachers and the motivation behind developing young children, but view the role of teacher as difficult. Forearmed is forewarned, and if these four competencies which were noted as gaps in the professional identity of Japanese ECEC teachers are used to scaffold the ITE programmes in South Africa, quality will be enhanced in not only the professional identity but the personal identity of young teachers. There are significant differences between the contexts of preschools in South Africa and Japan. However, we believe that analyzing different situations clarifies the essentiality of ECEC professional identity development.

Key words : Early Childhood Education, professional identity of preschool teachers in Japan and South Africa

1. Introduction

1.1 Understanding the issues

According to an OECD report, the “Starting Strong”ⁱ is important in maintaining the quality of ECEC (Early Childhood Education and Care) at a high level all over the world. Dr. Heckman’s researchⁱⁱ in the United States, makes it clear that high quality ECEC wields a significant impact on children’s future lives. The importance of ECEC has been on the rise all over the world. High quality ECEC is comprised of multiple factors, for example educational ideals, curriculum, teaching strategies, teaching environment, etc. Preschool teacher is expected to hold a key role at ECEC centers. Preschool teachers must have a high degree of professional knowledge and skill. But how do they develop their identities as professionals?

In Japan and South Africa, there is a problem that new preschool teachers leave their jobs after 1-3 years when they begin to work. Although many students want to become preschool teachers and obtain certificates, some of them are unable to continue in their jobs when they actually become teachers. Some research has been done regarding preschool teachers’ professional identity. For example, Takahama (2000)ⁱⁱⁱ examined how preschool teachers become expert in comprehending and solving problems. Kousokabe (2016)^{iv} describes the relationship between the preschool teacher’s identity and the actual community of ECEC. Still, the process of the original formulation of the preschool teacher’s identity remains unclear.

We must think about international perspectives when we consider ECEC. Of course there exists diversity between various countries, with regard to culture, history, language, politics, and so on. In discussing ECEC, we have to pay attention to both commonalities and differences in various countries.

This research aims to clarify current ECEC circumstances in Japan and South Africa. And we analyze Japanese new preschool teachers’ identity

from viewpoints of Japan and South Africa. When we discuss from Japan, we want to refer South African circumstance. There are significant differences between the contexts of preschools in South Africa and Japan. However, we believe that analyzing different situations clarifies the essentiality of ECEC professional identity development.

1.2 Research approach

Firstly, we explain the situation of the ECEC and preschool teachers in Japan and South Africa. We analyze the curriculum of four-year colleges where preschool teachers are educated in Japan and South Africa.

We interviewed Japanese new preschool teachers and made logs of them. We also analyzed the data by GTA (Grounded Theory Approach)^v. GTA is appropriate for making hypotheses and theory grounded in data gathered by researchers, rendering it useful for analyzing data from interviews with new preschool teachers. After representing the linkage between each category diagrammatically, as shown in Figure 1, we analyzed from the perspectives of both Japan and South Africa.

2. ECEC and preschool teachers in Japan

2.1 The system and educational policy of ECEC in Japan

The comprehensive support system for children and child-rearing started in April 2015, with the goal of improving early childhood care and education, and community child-rearing support in terms of both quality and quantity as well as eliminating waitlists.

In the Japanese system of early childhood education, there are three main but different types of facilities: *hoikusho* (nursery school), *yochien* (kindergarten), and *nintei kodomo-en* (center for early childhood education and care). Other than those, there are various non-formal ECEC programs in Japan. In

ⁱ OECD, Starting Strong I – IV

ⁱⁱ Heckman, James J., The Myth of Achievement Tests, University of Chicago Press, 2014, ジェームズ・J・ヘックマン『幼児教育の経済学』東洋経済新報社, 2015年

ⁱⁱⁱ Yuko, Takahama, The Process of Becoming an Expert Preschool Teacher, The Japanese Journal of Developmental Psychology 発達心理学研究 11 (3), 200 – 211, 2000 – 12

^{iv} Taku, Kousokabe, Transformation of Child Care Worker's Community in Self-Formation, Bulletin of Miyagi University of Education 宮城教育大学紀要 50, 171 – 180, 2015

^v Anselm Strauss, Juliet Corbin, Basics of qualitative research: techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory, Thousand Oaks : Sage Publications, c1998

addition, there are several community-based daycare services for a small group of children aged zero to two years, for example, family daycare, small-scale daycare, workplace daycare, home-visiting daycare.

Kindergartens provide three years of care and education for children from three years old to six years old. Nursery schools and centers for early childhood education and care accept infants from zero years old to six years old. Kindergartens are the schools that provide early childhood education to establish a foundation for education provided at elementary school and higher education. Nursery schools facilities provide daycare to children whose parents/guardians cannot look after their children at home because of employment obligations, etc. Centers for early childhood education and care are facilities that provide integrated education and childcare services. These facilities have the functions and characteristics of both kindergartens and nursery centers and also provide child-rearing support services for local communities^{vi}.

Kindergartens are regulated by the Kindergarten Course of Study stipulated by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology. According to guidelines, the fundamental aim of early childhood care and education is to educate young children through their environment. In this connection, teachers must endeavor to construct a relationship of trust with young children and to create a better educational environment together with them^{vii}.

To avoid a situation of one-way instruction and/or interference from the kindergarten teacher, it is the young children's' environment itself that generates the dynamic and interactive relationship between the kindergarten teacher and children. Through various experiences based on their interests and desires, children can develop their feelings, motivation, and attitude.

2. 2 ECEC Teacher Training in Japan

Kindergarten teacher licensing is regulated by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology. While nursery school teacher qualifications are regulated by the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare. Teacher of centers for early childhood education and care must be certificated and hold qualifications.

Preschool teachers (kindergarten teachers and nursery school teachers) are trained at four-year colleges and universities, and at two-year colleges. These colleges are almost private colleges. The Naruto University of Education plays as important role as a National University. Preschool teachers who graduated from Naruto University are expected to be leaders in early childhood education in Japan.

Laws and regulations have established the minimum number of credits that a person must acquire in the teacher training courses at universities, graduate schools, and junior colleges. Table 1 shows the basic requirements and the minimum number of credits needed to obtain a teaching certificate. Students study professional knowledge and skill, such as pedagogy, psychology, and welfare studies, through lectures and practice. Active learning including role play, case studies, and fieldwork, has recently been come to be regarded as important in Japanese universities.

Teaching practice is very important for improving teacher skills. Students of Naruto University of Education participate in kindergarten teaching practice for four days during the first year of the university, two weeks at a nursery school in the second year, four weeks at a kindergarten in the third year, and two weeks at a nursery school on the fourth year.

The teaching practicum is as the compilation of the material learned by prospective teachers. Students reflect on themselves through their portfolio.

Table 1 Minimum Number of Credits to Obtain Kindergarten Teaching Certificate

Type of Teaching Certificate	Minimum Number of Credits					
	Theory of Teacher	Basics of Pedagogy	Curriculum and Instruction Method	Understanding and Counselling of Children	Teaching Practice	Teaching Practicum
Advanced	2	6	18	2	5	2
Type I	2	6	18	2	5	2
Type II	2	4	12	2	5	2

^{vi} Cabinet Office, Government of Japan 2016 The Comprehensive Support System for Children and Child-rearing Information Booklet.

^{vii} The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology 2008 Course of Study for Kindergarten, Froebel-Kan.

3. ECEC (GRADE R) and preschool teachers in South Africa

3.1 Background

After apartheid, there have been considerable improvements in The Nationwide Audit of Early Childhood Development (ECD) in South Africa. The number of children in Grade R (R for Reception year) has trebled and the quality has improved slightly. Government expenditure on Grade R has increased three-fold since 2008/2009. The number of ECD center registered with the National Department of Social Development has increased to 19,500 and there are currently approximately 836,000 children in a registered ECD center, of which 488,000 received the ECD subsidy (Dlamini 2012). Many more children are in unregistered ECD centres, and no recent survey of ECD provision has been completed. We need to think of strategies for improving the status and self-esteem of ECD teachers, if we want to improve the quality of children's lives in South Africa. Given the critical goal of ECD in combating poverty and inequality, ECD must be an immediate priority for the South African government. ECD has thus become a right of every child in South Africa. Therefore, the importance of the professional identity of an ECD teacher is emphasized in this article.

3.2 Rationale

A comparison between the teacher identity formation in Japan and South Africa will enhance the understanding of the contextualized and global childhood and advance research regarding ECD teachers. Research on the professional identity formation of the Grade R teacher is examined in South Africa in a time where Early Childhood Development (ECD- birth to 9 years) is identified as a critical imperative in the National Developmental Plan (www.gov.za/sites/files/devplan_2).

With the dawn of democracy in 1994, South Africa's young children were the focus for the creation of equal opportunities as guaranteed by Sections 28 and 29 of the Bill of Rights of the Constitution of South Africa. Section 29 1(a) (1996). ECD Provisioning in South Africa (Department of Education, 2001) revealed the unfortunate state and inequalities regarding many children. This gave birth to the two important policies: Education White Paper 1 on Education and Training (1995) and the Interim Policy

of Early Childhood Development (1996) that formed the basis of the three- year National Reception Year Pilot Project in 1997. This project's main focus was for the provision of a national system of one year public provisioning of early childhood development, namely the Reception Year (Grade R) for five year olds turning six in the year of submission (White Paper 1, 1995). Universal access was envisioned by 2010. However, a major challenge was the accreditation of ECD practitioners and providers and the formulating and testing of curriculum policy.

In 2011 (revised in 2015) the Minimum Requirements for Teacher Education Qualifications was gazetted by the Parliament as a Government Gazette (Republic of South Africa), based on the Higher Education Qualifications Framework (HEQF). This policy aligns with the Council on Higher Education (CHE) and meets all the criteria for higher education qualification and agreed-upon standards at different levels as indicated by the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) act of 2008. The policy was developed through a consultative process involving the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), the Department of Basic Education (DBE), and others such as the South African Council of Educators (SACE). The policy opened various pathways for types of teacher education; specifically for Grade R as part of the Foundation Phase (NQF level 8) or a diploma in Grade R Teaching (NQF level 6). In addition the policy identified the types of learning related to Grade R as disciplinary learning, pedagogical learning, practical learning, fundamental learning, and situational learning. The collective roles and the basic competencies of the newner teacher (including the Grade R teacher) are also spelled out in the policy but only slightly referring to the professional identity of the teacher.

3.3 Challenges

Ebrahim (2012) stated that in apartheid South Africa the main project was the engineering of childhoods based on race. Adding to her argument, Nsamenang (2008) notes how a strong scientific system of early childhood gets mobilized through replacement or ignoring of the local culture instead of its enhancement. He draws attention to how the dominant theories used by interveners in early childhood rely on top-down wisdom of experts rather than embedded realities informed by rich cultural

worldviews. Nsameng (2009) also contends that, despite evidence of Africa having rich experiences of ECD within families, developmental scientists and childhood activists have ignored the evidence in favour of dominant accounts. There is a vast amount of African ECD knowledge in existing indigenous practices, folklores, ideas, metaphors/proverbs and participatory processes (Nsameng, 2008).

Universities in South Africa have trained teachers to teach according to Western norms. The rich diversity of cultural identity of a South African teacher is lost due to the neglect of valuing the diversity amongst the different cultures that constitute the tapestry of the South African society. Although, globalization and diversity in education is a module of BEd degree for Foundation Phase, students seem to believe that all schools will be ideal situations. Student teachers emerge with a very weak view of their strength and value as an ECE teacher. They devalue their ability to become a “professional teacher” and create the learning environment for excellence in teaching and learning of young children. Emerging teachers do not realize the impact that they create in the minds of the learners that they teach.

Reasons for this lack of empowerment for young emerging ECD teachers is that ECD is regarded as woman’s work. Little pay and poor work conditions are more likely occur in preschool and early childhood home-based settings. ECEC educators need to be developed in their professional roles, responsibilities and mindsets to embrace the challenges of care and education work in an emerging professional system. Their power as teachers is lowered due to their working conditions and the views that the community has regarding ECD teachers.

Besides, the interplay of the identities of the teacher and parent is pertinent to the South African education dissonance. Singer (1992) explains the separation of parents and teachers roles in preschool discourse is embedded in the mythic story of preschool’s origins which is situated in a poor rural area. She identifies the “ambiguous position” of mothers in relations to the new idea of a preschool teacher. In South Africa, preschools have more space, better play materials, and plenty of same age peers compared to most of the homes of disadvantaged learners. The teachers are also seen as superior to the mothers in the low economic societies. Preschool

teachers’ professional identity included a judgement of mothers who, never will be able to respond to their children in the appropriate manner as could teachers.

In South Africa, practice teaching is a large part of the Work Integrated Learning (WIL) and constitutes 36 credits or 360 hours of observation and mentorship at schools around South Africa. It is envisaged that when the teachers are mentored by the teachers in schools, they will develop a positive professional identity. However, due to the lack of good preschools (there are many of them-but not everyone is good) for WIL, students teachers are not exposed to a variety of good practices and theory is thus not put into practice when they start their careers.

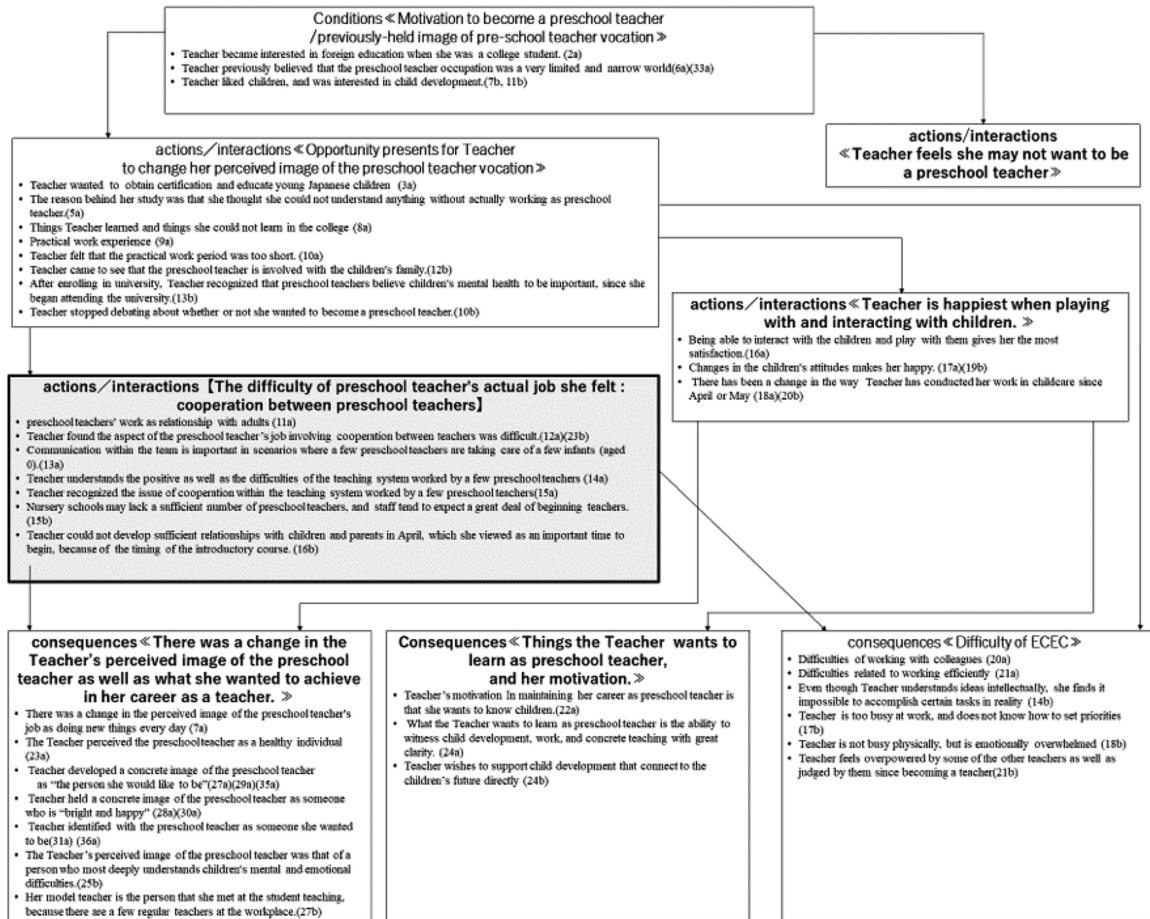
4. An example of forging identity as a new teacher of early childhood education in Japan

To clarify how a new teacher of ECEC develops her identity, we interviewed two teachers who graduated from the Naruto University of Education. One of them belonged to the Master Course when she was a graduate student, and another belonged to the undergraduate course. They now work at nursery schools. They teach and take care of babies and infants zero years of age. The interview was conducted in 2016 at the Naruto University of Education. There were two interviews, which were recorded by IC recorder. Each person was interviewed for a total of about 20 minutes. In principle, the content of the interviews was decided before, but we also talked freely about related subjects. We created a log of the recorded interviews and analyzed the data by GTA. We made the linkage between each category diagrammatically each person, integrated them, and yielded the figures as in (F. 1).

4. 1 Story Line

At first, we explain about the Conditions<<The motivation to become a preschool teacher and the image she previously held of the occupation>>. “She liked young children and she was interested in the development of the young child around her. ” “She was interested in foreign education when she was a college student”, but she had “previous image of preschool teacher as being in very limited and narrow world”. She then decided to enroll in the Naruto University of Education.

After enrolling in the master course, she had



F. 1

<<an opportunity of changing the image of preschool teacher>>. “She thought that the job of the preschool teacher was simply to teach children before attending university, and she learned that teacher taught deeply children’s minds and emotions, and that they considered part of the family in terms of young children’s education and care once she began doing it”. And although she was interested in education abroad, “she wanted to obtain her certificate and educate Japanese young children”. “The reason of her study was that she thought she could not understand anything without actually working as a preschool teacher.” She learned many things at classes and by way of student practical work, obtaining her teaching certificate through graduate school.

She now feels that **[the cooperation between preschool teachers is a challenge in the actual job.]** Preschool teachers have to not only educate children, but also “develop relationships with other adults.” “In preschool teacher’s work, cooperation between teachers is a challenging but very important” to educate children well. The classes of babies and

infants are educated and taken care of by some teachers. In fact, teachers are part of “the team”. She said the “team” dynamic was difficult but required for educating and taking care of young children. It required a high level of efficacy to work.

And <<what teacher feels happiest about>> is “being able to play and interact with children delightfully” and “the witnessing changes in the attitudes of children’ in her care also pleases her greatly”.

There are three consequences. 1) <<changes were evident in the previous image of the preschool teacher, and holding a concrete image of the kind of preschool teacher she wants to be. >> Previously, she believed that preschool teacher had a limited and narrow world. Now she “changes image of preschool teacher’s job as doing new things every day”. This teacher views preschool teacher as “healthy, bright, and happy people”. 2) <<what teacher wants to learn as a preschool teacher and her motivation. >> “Her motivation to maintain her carrier as a preschool teacher is that she wants to know the

children” and to strives for “the ability to see clearly issues pertaining to child development, projects, and concrete means of teaching and playing.” “To support child developing directly linked to the children’s future” is her motivation. 3) << Difficulties of ECEC. >> “The teacher believed that cooperation between preschool teachers was difficult. She believed that accomplishing the work was extremely challenging.” “In her mind, she felt she knew what to do, but she could not actually implement it”, because she felt busy, nervous and afraid of failure, and lacked the ability to prioritize. ”

4. 2. Discussion

We interviewed preschool teachers who graduated from the Naruto University of Education to clarify how new teachers of ECEC established their identities.

The subjects changed their minds regarding the image of the preschool teacher compared to their impressions prior to enrolling in university. After they studied at the university and had worked in a preschool, their perceived image of the preschool teacher is that of a person who does brand new work every day and is healthy, bright, and happy. They think preschool teachers can understand children’s feelings and troubles; however, they would prefer more cooperation from their experienced colleagues. They seem to think teachers for babies and infants need to cooperate as a team. They felt that teachers should share children’s information, time schedules, teaching methods, and so on and they believe that on-the-job training is better than at university. Since they are new teachers, the senior colleagues assist them in learning the importance of cooperation. At university, students can learn how to teach and take care of children, but they cannot learn how to cooperate with other teachers and educate children with other teachers.

This interview makes it clear that cooperating with other teachers is important to establishing the identity of preschool teachers. It is very difficult for new teachers to acquire professional teacher training as well as care skills and knowledge, and to cooperate with other teachers.

Then we want to refer to South Africa’s circumstance of ECEC. They indicate that the problems of poverty and inequality, what to learn

to be Grade R teacher, and relationship between preschool teacher’s professional identity and mothers’ caring. These are serious problems about ECEC in South Africa. But I think we can share those problems of ECEC.

For example, children’s poverty is getting seen as problem recently in Japan. And Japanese preschool system does not have the reception grade that help children transit from kindergarten grade to elementary school grade, like Grade R. But preschool teachers think what to teach 6 years old children before elementary school. Some Japanese confuse preschool teacher’s professional teaching with parents’ caring.

But Japanese new preschool teachers who we interviewed this time, did not refer these topics when they answered on our question about their identities.

These topics are important for Japanese preschool teacher, but when they just begin to work at preschool, they cannot think these problem and combine them with making their professional identity. The things that are concern with making their identity, are focused on children who they are caring now and relationship with other courageous teachers.

Almost 70% of preschool teachers graduated from two year colleges, almost 29% of preschool teachers from four-year universities, and under 1% of preschool teachers from graduate school of university in Japan. In fact alumni of our university seem to lack role model teachers with the same career that they have while they are working at preschools, because there are a few national universities that teach ECEC. But despite degree and career courses, the ability to form one’s identity as a new teacher is associated with whether they can identify with model teachers who have high skills of teaching, taking care, good attitude (healthy and bright), as well as cooperating with new teachers.

Another problem is the fact that alumni of our universities form their original identity as leaders of preschool teachers as they continue on in their careers; yet this area has also been neglected.

5. Discussion for GTA data of Japanese teacher from South Africa’s view

The process of GTA data analysis through situation, action and interaction led to conclusions. This analysis process made it possible for three major themes to emerge as conclusions which related to the

professional identity of the participants. Theme one emerged as the change of preschool teacher's image, expressed as not only playing with young children but developing and molding the minds and emotions of a young child. It is therefore, necessary to ensure that teachers are taught about play pedagogy and the relationship to the emotional, physical, cognitive and social development of a young child.

Theme two emerged as "on-the-job" mentorship and coaching from experienced teachers regarding the correct way of "educating and taking care of young children effectively" It is important for the new emerging teacher to form respectful relationships with experienced teachers and the mentorship and coaching would certainly enforce the positive identity of the teacher. Theme three emerged as "the lack of confidence of new teachers regarding the play pedagogy of young children, prioritizing activities for children and developing a positive spirit of an ECEC teacher (healthy, bright, happy teacher). Not only will these findings assist in the updating of the existing B. Ed (Foundation Phase) programme but add value to the new Programme, BEd (ECEC). In South Africa, The *Policy on Minimum Requirements for Programmes Leading to Qualifications in Higher Education for ECD Educators-PLMRP* (2017) is historic as it officially opens up the doors of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to develop and deliver ECCE programmes through a competency-based model in ITE and continuing teacher education.

From the Japanese, we have learnt that part of the competencies of a young professional ECEC teachers should consist of the following learning outcomes in the design of the initial teacher education curriculum.

- Developing the reflective professional ECEC teacher's identity
- Play pedagogy and the emotional, physical, cognitive and social development of the young child
- Mentorship and coaching during the teaching practice
- Emotional intelligence of the ECEC teacher

6. Conclusion

In this paper, we clarified current conditions surrounding ECEC in Japan and South Africa. We made it clear that forging the identity of new teachers of early childhood education in Japan happens through

cooperation with other teachers on actual jobs. They hold a positive image of preschool teachers and the motivation behind developing young children, but view the role of teacher as difficult.

Forearmed is forewarned, and if these four competencies which were noted as gaps in the professional identity of Japanese ECEC teachers are used to scaffold the ITE programmes in South Africa, quality will be enhanced in not only the professional identity but the personal identity of young teachers.

Though we realize circumstances between Japan and South Africa differ, Japanese GTA data is useful to teacher education curricula-building at universities in South Africa.

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