A comparative study of primary school pupils’ social skills amongst nine nations: Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, China, Malaysia, Nepal, South Africa, UK and Spain

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Research objectives

This study compared the social skills of primary school children from nine countries and it took for over two years, supported by the 21st century children Research Project at SOKA University. Over the last decade, Research team of Soka University (Prof. Haruo Magari and his colleagues) have examined the social and cognitive aspects of child development. These researches have investigated children’s consciousness and beliefs, both at home and in schools, using pupils attending primary, junior high and high schools in Japan and South Korea (2000), along with pupils attending primary schools in Kaohsiung City, Hong Kong, Seoul & Tokyo (2001). Research has also been carried out which examines the sympathetic behaviour of primary school children in six countries; Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Malaysia, the United States and the United Kingdom (2006). In addition, adults understandings of parenting roles in Japan, South Korea and the UK (2003) and the analysis of a composition of the school refusal children and their parents in Japan and Korea (2002) were investigated. Considering these research findings

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and results, this study analyzes and discusses the social skills (relationship skills) of Japanese primary school children, with comparisons made to eight other countries.

The Early Childhood Education Central Council for Education (2007) examines how education and teaching in Japan can effectively nourish children’s minds and their “zest for living”. It appears that educational effects are becoming weakened, and many children show an inability to express themselves properly, and lack the communication skills necessary to maintain good relationships with others. These poor communication skills on the part of the child seems be related with nowadays’ children issues, such as school refusal, bullies, domestic violence caused by children, children’s tendencies to easily lose their temper, their low self—esteesms, and so on. Social skills are generally defined as one’s ability to deepen their social connections to others and live together harmoniously within a society. Its theoretical structures and the way of training to help children acquire the social skills have been investigated in the field of psychology (Aikawa & Tsumura 1996, Kokubu 1999, Onuki, Nagoshi, & Sanwa 2004, etc). However there is no research which examines children’s social skills from a cross-cultural perspective. Therefore, this comparative study examined children’s social skills in nine nations: Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, China, Malaysia, Nepal, South Africa, UK and Spain.

Three separate elements were address; children’s social skills, consciousness and actual situations within their lives, and the influence of social skills. Each element is further specified below.

Firstly, children’s social skills in the home and school were investigated in terms of three aspects, 1) “behaviours for maintaining good relationships with others”, 2) “behaviours to improve one’s relationships with others”, and 3) “assertive behaviours and abilities”. “Behaviours for maintaining good relationships with others” refers to the ability and skills of children which help them to keep healthy relationships with parents, siblings, teachers and friends. Such behaviours can involve not using aggressive and abusive words against parents, not losing one’s temper when told off by parents, and not saying hurtful or bad language to friends. “Behaviours to improve one’s relationships with others” are necessary for developing relationships with others in home and schools. These include actions such as saying ‘thank you’ to parents, helping other family members at home, and helping friends when they are in trouble. “Assertive behaviours and abilities” are skills through which to express one’s own ideas and opinions when they are required, such as speaking up in front of others, and giving advice to friends when they have
done something wrong.

Secondly, children’s consciousness and actual situations regarding their life (at home and schools) were examined in terms of six aspects. 1) Children’s recognitions of self expression, and the expression of others around them (what are the facial expressions of self, parents, teachers and friends?); 2) the degree of children’s satisfaction in their home (how much do children feel secure and how much attachment and love do children receive from their parents?); 3) the degree of children’s satisfaction about school life (how much do children enjoy school life and are interested in their study?); 4) the degree of self—improvement (how much do children make efforts in their study and how much do children take care of their friends?); 5) the degree of patriotism (how much pride do children feel toward their nations culture and traditions?); and 6) the eating habits of children (do children have breakfast or not, and children’s habits in choosing their food?).

Thirdly, the influence of children’s social skills on their life style (at home and schools) was investigated (ability to keep good relationships, improving relationships and assertiveness) and children’s consciousness of, and actual situations within their life (at home and schools) were examined from various viewpoints.

Method

1. Questionnaires

Questions on social skills

For each measure of children’s social skills (relationship skills), questions were initially based on those used by Togasaki and Sakano (1997) with some revisions and additions made. In total, this questionnaire consisted of 30 questions. Regarding these 30 questions, data was collected from 2039 pupils in primary schools in Tokyo. Factor Analysis was used to validate questions and generated seven factors: 1) improving relationships in home consisting of six questions, 2) assertion in home consisting of three questions, 3) relationship skills consisting of three questions, 4) improving relationships in schools consisting of six questions, 5) assertion in school consisting of three questions, 6) relationship skills consisting of three questions in total and 7) others, six questions belonging to related social skills.

Questions on children’s consciousness and actual life situations

In order to understand children’s actual life situations, twenty three questions
were added to the social skills questionnaire. Factor analysis on these items indicated five factors: 8) facial expressions of people (including self) around school, home and the local area, six questions, 9) the degree of children’s satisfaction in their home, the degree of children’s satisfaction about school life, the degree of self-improvement in their study, and the degree of patriotism, eight questions, 10) the actual situation of children’s eating habits, four questions, 11) dreams for the future, free descriptions, 12) gender, grade, numbers of siblings, and whether they lived in the same house as their grandparents, four questions.

**Translation to each nation’s language**

The Japanese questionnaire was translated into each nation’s language by overseas exchange students. The questionnaires for Taiwan, Xinjiang Uygur (China), Malaysia, and South Africa were translated by the students from each country who had been lived in Japan for more than five years. The questionnaires for South Korea, Nepal, the UK and Spain were translated by Japanese citizens who had resided in each of these countries for more than four years. These translated questionnaires were then revised by native school teachers or Japanese teachers who had the experience of living within each country.

Questionnaires were translated into the native language used in each country. This was: for Xinjiang Uygur – Uyghur, for Nepal – Nepalese, for Malaysia and Taiwan – Chinese (the Malaysian sample was obtained from Chinese schools), for South Africa and the UK – English, for Spain – Spanish, for Korea – Korean.

2. Samples and valid responses

In total 8,712 questionnaires were collected, the demographic statistics for each nation are indicated below. In collecting data for this survey, permission was obtained for the head teachers in each school. The survey was conducted in the classrooms of the pupil who participated in the study.

1) Japan

Questionnaires were completed by 1054 5th grade and 985 6th grade primary school pupils, a total of 2039 pupils (1058 male, 981 female) living in Tokyo.

2) South Korea

Questionnaires were completed by 547 5th grade and 428 6th grade primary school pupils, a total of 975 children (529 male, 446 female) living in Seoul and Chungjoo.
3) Taiwan
This sample was comprised of 399 5th grade and 477 6th grade pupils, a total of 876 pupils (443 male, 433 female) living in Hualien County

4) Xinjiang uygur (China)
Questionnaires were filled in by 436 5th grade and 420 6th grade primary school pupils, a total of 856 children (393 male, 463 female) living in Urumqi and Turpan.

5) Malaysia
This sample was comprised of 613 5th grade and 443 6th grade primary school pupils, a total of 1056 children (497 male, 559 female) living in Kuala Lumpur and Johor.

6) Nepal
This sample was comprised of 439 5th grade and 399 6th grade primary school pupils, a total of 838 children (442 male, 396 female) living in Kathmandu.

7) South Africa
Questionnaires were completed by 464 5th grade and 564 6th grade primary school pupils, a total of 1028 children (465 male, 563 female) living in Johannesburg.

8) The UK
This sample was comprised of 230 fifth year primary school pupils, and 450 sixth year secondary school pupils, a total of 680 children (355 male, 325 female) attending schools in Derby, Nottingham and Sheffield.

9) Spain
This sample was comprised of 174 5th grade and 190 6th grade primary school pupils, a total of 364 children (190 male, 174 female) from Barcelona.

3. Procedure
Research period
The data was collected over the course of two years, in Japan, Xinjiang Uygur (China), Taiwan, South Korea and South Africa in 2006 and Malaysia, Nepal, Spain, and the UK in 2007.

Educational situations of the nine nations

South Korea (S.K)
In South Korea, educational schools systems are the same as Japanese school
systems: 6 years for primary school, 3 years for junior high school, 3 years for high school and 4 years for university. Compulsory education is primary and junior high school, a total of 9 years. The semester starts in March and the whole educational year finishes at the end of February in the coming year. Most areas of primary school educational programme in South Korea and Japan overlap, however, in South Korea there are programmed English classes twice per week from the beginning of 3rd grade. Additionally, it is very unique that there are Etiquette education for 4 hours in the second semester. This programme is conducted in special rooms, teaching children to speak politely and show manners toward older people, including how to bow properly, and answer the phone with good manners. Because South Korean society has its roots in Confucian customs which respect ancestors, parents and old people, it would be expected that courtesy is typically incorporated into the educational system. On the contrary however, South Korean society praises educational credentials more strongly than Japan, resulting in high stress being placed on children due to examinations and competition for school places. Because of this, some children have difficulties expressing their feeling and worries towards others, and also show problems communicating with others, which, in some extreme cases, has led children to commit suicide or fall into delinquency. Even though South Korea seems to have national characters which express and assert their honest feeling to others, there are some children who can not keep healthy relationships with others and struggle to live in that society.

Taiwan (TA)

In Taiwan, compulsory education takes place through “National schools”, composed of 6 years at national schools and 3 years at national secondary schools, a total of 9 years.

In addition, after 3 years at higher secondary schools (high school), or vocational schools, pupils can attend university. The educational term starts in September and most schools at all use a two term system. The entrance examination war is much harder than in Japan. Additionally there are military conscriptions which apply to all young men aged over 20, and even graduates must join the military services for 1 year and a half. Taiwan is geographically complicated place, as shown by historical records, and the various nations that have invaded the country, leading to a great variety of cultures. It is normally said that people in Taiwan are compassionate, however, because of the large gap between the rich and poor, radical changes in their living situations, complaints, and hopelessness, people have
become more used to expressing their aggressive feelings.

**Xinjiang Uygur [China] (CH)**

In Xinjiang Uygur, school systems are the same as those in Japan: 6 years for primary school, 3 years for junior high school, 3 years for high school and 4 years for university. However, the payment of tuition fees is compulsory for 9 years of education, and families experience difficulties in sending children to schools. There are three types of primary schools: ethnic schools for minority groups, Chinese schools for Han Chinese, and mixed schools, where pupils are taught to speak both languages. A class generally consists of 30 pupils. Most Uygurs practice Islam, and half of population are Uyrule. They have strong custom which respect older people and parents, with the elderly also expected to look after younger people, a tenet based on Islamic views. Children also strongly respect the parents who look after them, and there are strong connections within the family. In addition, Uygurs hold strong traditional views through which the whole community look after and support children. Also there are firm connections between communities. Policies regarding revolution and reformation are being applied across China in attempts to modernise the nation, and it has been suggested this progress may negatively effect children’s communication skills; however there appears to be, as yet, no lessening of children’s abilities to communicate with others.

**Malaysia (MA)**

In Malaysia’s educational system, primary school lasts for 6 years, secondary school for 5 years, and the foundation course for University, 2 years. There is no compulsory education, however, primary and secondary tuition is free. Primary school attendance is virtually 100 percent in Malaysia. Since a large number of Malaysians practice Islam, many children go to school to study Imams. They learn how to read the Koran, how to pray, and study the Arabic language. The population is mostly formed of three ethnic groups: Malaysian, Chinese and Indian. Therefore, daily school lives can vary in style, and depend heavily on the teachers themselves. This study was carried out in Chinese schools. On holidays, children have time to stay with family, help their parents with house work, and go on trips with their family. Malaysians have a tendency to eat meals with the family, and appear to show regular communication.
Nepal (NE)

The educational system in Nepal consists of 5 years at primary school, 2 years at pre-secondary schools, and 3 years at middle secondary schools. The schools are classified into two types: public schools and private schools. Private schools are not financially supported by the government, therefore needing to collect tuition fees and run the school themselves. Legally, all public schools are tuition free and receive financial support from the government. However, the government’s financial support only provides for teachers’ salaries and maintenance fees, and most schools have financial difficulties. Therefore some schools need small amounts of fees from pupils within the legally accepted level. The numbers of private schools are gradually increasing in rich cities and areas, and most middle class children study in them. Private schools keep their educational environment at a high standard, and the gap in quality of education between private schools and public schools are getting increasingly larger. In addition, it is said that there is a shortage of over 2000 schools, and the literacy rate at 15 years is about 20%. Most children do not have enough money to buy textbooks and pencils, and have to give up studying at school. The Nepalese population is composed of more than 30 ethnic groups and tribes, but these can be mainly classified into Indian, Tibetan and Central Asian. The national language is Nepali, which is spoken by 90% of the population, however there are an additional 12 other languages, and 30 dialects. English is widely used and some educational organizations apply English for teaching systems. Nepal has a caste systems based on Hinduism, and class distinctions still remain in Nepali society. Even though equality of life is insured through legislation, people from lower class are still discredited in the society (in terms of social customs). Providing educational support to children who are discriminated against by society is a serious issue.

South Africa (S.A)

The South African educational system comprises 7 years of primary school (2 years for reception class, 5 grades for standard), and 5 years of secondary school (6-10th grade), which is compulsory until 8th grade. After 8th grade, tuition fees become very expensive thus most children leave schools. The average length of education is 13 years for white people, and 7 years for black people; most black people receive only primary school education. There are few complaints about school life, but schools in poor areas often do not have adequate educational facilities such as computers. The rate of divorce is very high, and there are many prob-
problems in relationships between children, parents, and friends.

Generally, each school has a guidance teacher who can help children’s social problems.

Discrimination, ethnicity, and gender are serious social issues caused by unequal social structures. Apartheid acted as a law for justifying discrimination and hierarchy of status, and this has directly caused conflicts among people belonging to different social statuses. There is no way to escape from poverty for some people. There are strong relationships between the level of education people receive and their level of poverty. People with extremely low social status are unlikely to complete even their primary school education, and may receive no education at all during their lives. However, after the abolition of apartheid in 1984, reformation was made across the whole of South African society, and education is one of the areas that have been influenced by this.

United Kingdom (UK)

Compulsory education entails both primary (5–11 years old) and secondary school (11–16 years old). Pupils in secondary school take exams at the end of each term, and are required to have a good record for entering university. There are three terms in a year: from the beginning of September until the end of December (first term), from the beginning of January until the end of March (second term), and from mid–April until the end of July (third term). Terms are interrupted by 10 national holidays. The number of children in one class is generally thirty or less, but some classes might have as few as 10 children. Teaching a small number of children means that a teacher can cope with a child’s individual needs. Due to the colonial history of the UK, British society contains many multi-cultural aspects. British society allows for open discussion in public about multicultural issues, but it appears this level of diversity is not always respected in the classroom: non-native children may shower low self-esteem and have difficulty acknowledging their uniqueness. In order to create an education and society that respects each individual, multicultural education has been carried out through the use of textbooks. Eventually, education around diversity can contribute further towards the flexibility of culture.

Spain (SP)

There is no classification between primary and secondary school, 6–15 years old children receive compulsory education and after this, children choose high school
or secondary vocational school for two years. Term starts during September, and
the summer holiday starts at the end of June. In September 1992, a new educa-
tional system was applied to 6–7 years old children. Previously there had been 40
children to a class, but this dropped down to 25 children after introducing the new
system. Compulsory education was extended for a further two years. The age at
which children begin to learn a foreign language has been changed: from 11 to 8
years old. Also, specialised teachers are allocated for music and athletics classes,
and children can choose their religious class. This change was made influenced
through educational reformation among EU countries. Children may have lunch at
either home or school. The birth rate in Spain has lowered, and couples tend to
have only one child, meaning that parents invest a lot of energy and financial sup-
port in their child’s education.

Japan (JA)

In 1998, the Early Childhood Education Central Council for Education dis-
cussed the issue of ‘zest for living’, and emphasized a ‘relaxed education’ which
focused on the necessity of acquiring a sense of justice, a warm heart, and improv-
ing the moral level of society. This led to the creation of new National Curriculum
Standards. This has helped to improve pupils’ global life but has been criticized
for lowering academic achievement. Therefore, the next revision of the National
Curriculum Standards places less emphasis on relaxed education and an increased
focus on education in academic subjects, including foreign languages. The New
National Curriculum Standards emphasized: 1) obtaining basic academic knowl-
edge and skills, 2) improving abilities for logical thinking, decision making, and
expression of ideas, while also keeping focus on balancing pupil’s global life.
Class collapse, bullying (ijime), truancy, hikikomori, disruptive behaviour, and ju-
venile delinquency are serious social problems. It is very important to nourish pu-
pils’ communication skills to allow for good relationships. This is one of the most
important educational issues in Japan.

Results and discussion

Does it improve children’s social skills or not? – From the viewpoint of compa-

darative studies.

The aim of these comparative studies is to attempt to clarify the communication
and relationship skills of Japanese children, by making comparisons with children
from 9 other nations. In addition, by comparing children’s social skills and beliefs about their lifestyles at home and school using the differing points of view, the study attempts to explore the relationship regarding how social skills affect an individual’s actual life situations in the home and school. Nowadays, there appears to be an increasing tendency for Japanese children to become engaged in bullying, truancy, and domestic violence, and a higher likelihood that they may lose their temper. It seems that the levels of Japanese children’s social and relationship skills are becoming lower and lower. Considering the current situation in the Japanese educational system, primary schools in particular offer various programmes such as SGE (Structured Group Encounter) which are based upon educational psychology, and can be used for enriching children’s social skills. In this kind of situation, it is not known to what extent Japanese children’s social skills are improved or not. In response to these questions, we will provide a discussion of the issues based on these comparative studies.

1. Concerns regarding Japanese primary school children’s social skills

Relationship skills in the home – Japanese lowest among 9 countries

First of all, from what we can say regarding the whole study, Japanese children’s social skills are comparatively very low. This study compared each country’s social skills levels and content providing a series of rankings. These clearly showed the social skills of Japanese school children were at a very low level. The most worrying point regarding social skills within the home was the ability of Japanese children to maintain harmonious relationships with other family members. Comparing average scores across three questions measuring relationship skills in the home, children living in Xinjiang Uygur and Nepal scored highest, while children living in Japan scored lowest. Also, in the question which asked about children’s ability to maintain good relationships, Japanese primary school children scored lowest out of the 9 countries. In addition, the question regarding ability to improve relationships, Spain and Nepal were ranked first and second respectively, however Japanese children scored 7 out of 9. Regarding ability to communicate effectively Spain and South Korea were placed first and second, while Japanese children were much lower down in 6th position. We analysed the results to observe for any statistical significance regarding three skills; relationship skills, ability to improve relationships, and assertiveness. The scores in each country were found to significantly differ from each other.
2. “When scolded by parents, children easily lose temper” — Japan scored lowest out of the nine countries, with 56% of children reporting they lost their temper after being scolded by parents.

Now we will examine the details of children’s abilities to keep relationships. First, when children were asked if they lost their temper when scolded by parents, only 10–14% of children living in Xinjiang Uygur and Nepal either agreed or strongly agreed. In Japan, 56% of children stated that they agreed, which was higher than South Africa, where 52% of children similarly agreed. A gender difference was found among Japanese children in relation to this question; 54% of boys agreed, compared to 59% of girls. Primary school girls showed a tendency to exhibit aggressive attitudes towards their parents. Magari et al. (2001), who carried out similar research in Tokyo, Seoul, Hong Kong, and Kaohsiung City showed almost identical results. Regarding this question, 54% of children living in Tokyo agreed or strongly agreed, showing the tendency of Japanese primary school children to express their feelings in the home. This tendency has been widely discussed through the media, having received increased attention over recent years.

Figure 1 “If I am given strict guidance by parents, I lose my temper easily”

[Note: Japan=JA, South Korea=S.K, Taiwan=TA, China=CH, Malaysia=MA, Nepal=NE, South Africa=S.A, the UK=UK and Spain=SP].
3. “Aggressive words towards parents” — 27% of Japanese children used aggressive language towards their parents, the highest score out of the nine countries.

Regarding this question, only 2–8% of children living in Nepal, Xinjiang Uygur, South Korea, Spain, and Malaysia agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. On the other hand, 27% of Japanese children agreed with this statement, the highest among all the countries. Examining this results by gender, 29% of boys and 26% of girls reported using aggressive language towards their parents. Despite South Korea having a similar educational system to Japan, and be influenced by Confucian beliefs, only 7% of South Korean children agreed to this question. Regarding the levels of respect shown towards parents, big differences were found between Japan and Korea, showing similarities to the results of Magari et al. (2004). Another question regarding children’s ability to maintain good relationships asked whether children had often lied to their parents. South African children scored highest with 72% agreeing or strongly agreeing. 58% of Japanese children...
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![Bar chart showing the percentage of agreement with the statement "I have often lied to my parents" across different countries.

Figure 3 “I have often lied to my parents”

[Note : Japan=JA, South Korea=S.K, Taiwan=TA, China=CH, Malaysia=MA, Nepal=NE, South Africa=S.A, the UK=UK and Spain=SP].

Japanese children similarly agreed, second highest number behind South Africa. In South Africa, this research was carried out in Johannesburg, a city with a very high crime rate, and a large gap between the poor and the rich. These factors may have had some effect on the results of the research.

4. Japanese primary school children exhibit low levels of communication skills during their school life

Japanese children showed the lowest levels of assertion skills in school among all countries. This research discusses social skills in children’s school lives. As the figures illustrate, Japanese children show the lowest level of social skills. Relationship improving behaviour was measured using question which asked children whether they would provide help if a friend was in trouble, or would look after younger pupils. Results showed Nepal and Xinjiang Uygur placed highest among the nine countries, while children in Japan only ranked in eighth place. Comparing each nations results, Japanese children were the least likely to agree with the statements ‘When I have different opinions to my friends, I speak out’, and ‘I can say my ideas and feelings in front of everyone at school’. This show Japanese children
clearly show a lack of assertion skills and the ability to express themselves. Also, regarding children’s ability to maintain good relationships in schools, Japanese primary school children were ranked 7th out of the nine countries. The Japanese Department for Education (2007) announced the number of bullying incidents reported in 2006 was 124,898, six times as many as the number of incidents reported in 2005. It must be considered that the increase in bullying may be in part due to the surveys used to measure incidents of bullying, and the ways in which these figures are analyzed. Among these incidents, the majority were form of teasing (66%), or isolation (25%). However, in Japan it appears that bullying may be strongly affected by the social skills of children. An important educational issue is how to improve the social skills of bullies and how to assist victims of bullying in improving their assertive skills.

5. “When friends are in trouble, do you help them out?” – Japanese children show the lowest likelihood of helping others.

Examining this in detail, when asked the question ‘Do you help out friends who
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Figure 5 “I help my friends if they have difficulties”
[Note: Japan=JA, South Korea=S.K, Taiwan=TA, China=CH, Malaysia=MA, Nepal=NE, South Africa=S.A, the UK=UK and Spain=SP].

Figure 6 “I help my teachers at school”
[Note: Japan=JA, South Korea=S.K, Taiwan=TA, China=CH, Malaysia=MA, Nepal=NE, South Africa=S.A, the UK=UK and Spain=SP].
are in trouble', 71% of Spanish children strongly agreed, followed by 61% in Nepal, 52% in Xinjiang Uygur, and 35–39% of pupils in Japan, Taiwan, South Korea. Among Japanese children, 35% similarly agreed, the lowest percentage among the nine countries. Over 90% of children in Nepal, Spain, Xinjiang Uygur and the UK either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. In comparison, only 81% and 80% pupils in Japan and South Korea respectively agreed or strongly agreed, ranking these countries lowest out of the nine. Among the East Asian countries, 16–20% of children in Japan, South Korea and Taiwan reported that they disagreed or strongly disagreed with helping out a friend who was in trouble. Relationship improving behaviour such as helping a friend in trouble can be viewed as altruistic behaviour. East Asian children tend to show the lowest levels of helping behaviour, and this may be influenced by the education systems in these countries which is heavily focused on the academic outcomes of education, placing less emphasis on developing social relationships. Also, regarding whether children helped their school teachers, in seven countries, more than 60% of children agreed or strongly agreed with this statement; however only 47% of Japanese pupils similarly agree.

Figure 7 “When I have different opinions to my friends, I speak out that”
[Note: Japan=JA, South Korea=S.K, Taiwan=TA, China=CH, Malaysia=MA, Nepal=NE, South Africa=S.A, the UK=UK and Spain=SP].

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These figures imply less communication between teachers and children in Japan than other countries.

6. “Expressing their own ideas” – In Japan, 57% of children showed strong assertion skills, the lowest percentage among the nine countries.

Assertion skills in the school were measured by asking children whether they spoke out when their opinions differed from their friends. Regarding those who strongly agreed and agreed, Japanese children scored lowest, with 57% responding in this way. When children were asked whether they felt able to say their ideas and feelings in front of everyone at school, 41% of Japanese school children either agreed or strongly agreed, ranking them 7th among the 9 countries. Overall, Japanese primary school children showed consistently lower levels of assertion skills. Telling one’s opinions and feelings to others is a basic assertion skill, but Japanese pupils appeared to be very poor in performing this task, raising serious concerns about the social skills of these children. Children were additionally asked whether they felt able to tell their friends not to do something when they were doing some...
thing wrong. In total, 58–62% of pupils in Japan, South Korea and Taiwan agreed or strongly agreed with this statement, a comparatively lower score than found in the remaining six countries. Morita’s structural theory of bullying groups (1985) highlighted the importance of defenders of mediators in preventing incidents of bullying. Children who can play this role must show a high level of assertion skills, therefore the lack of the skills among many Japanese children is a worrying finding.

7. Nourishing children’s minds and their zest for living

This research also tried to investigate the extent to which children feel secure in their homes, using a scale of 0 to 100. Japanese children scored an average of 91.3%, the highest score out of the nine countries. This result strongly contrasts with the low scores achieved by Japanese children regarding their ability to maintain harmonious relationships with others. However, if Japanese children feel secure within their home, it suggests they are free to express their feelings within the home environment. In a sense, Japanese children who took part in the research were in a better material and financial position when compared with the children.

![Figure 9 “How much do children feel secure at their home”](image_url)
from eight other nations. These results provide some proof of the extent to which Japanese society is a child centred environment, and children are indulged heavily by the parents. In countries whose financial and material position is lower than that in Japan, particularly Nepal and Xinjiang Uygur, children felt less secure in the home (i.e. Nepal 71.8 %, Xinjiang Uygur 84.2). In a sense, the lower ability of Japanese children to establish and maintain good relationships may have been created through the indulgent and less severe environment in which they are raised. Therefore it could be concluded that Japanese children’s lack of social skills are strongly to the indulgent environment.

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Summary

This study analysed and discussed the social skills (relationship skills) of Japanese primary school children, with comparisons made to eight other countries. The questionnaire consisted of 56 questions; 30 questions for children’s social skills & 24 questions for children’s actual life situations. The study showed, regarding the whole study, Japanese children’s social skills were comparatively very low. When children were asked if they lost their temper when scolded by parents, only 10–14% of children living in China (Xinjiang Uyghur) and Nepal chose either ‘agreed’ or ‘strongly agreed’. However, in Japan, 56% of children stated that they ‘agreed’, which was higher than South Africa (52%). Also the study indicated Japanese children clearly show a lack of assertion skills and the ability to express themselves (e.g. ‘When I have different opinions to my friends, I speak out’, and ‘I can say my ideas and feelings in front of everyone at school’). In addition, when asked the question ‘Do you help out friends who are in trouble’, 71% of Spanish children strongly agreed, followed by 61% in Nepal, 52% in Xinjiang Uyghur, and 35–39% of pupils in Japan, Taiwan, South Korea. Among Japanese children, 35% similarly agreed, the lowest percentage among the nine countries. Relationship improving behaviour such as helping a friend in trouble can be viewed as altruistic behaviour. East Asian children tend to show the lowest levels of helping behaviour, and this may be influenced by the education systems in these countries which were heavily focused on the academic outcomes of education which placed less emphasis on developing social relationships. The national comparison provided a powerful and deep understanding of children’s social skills. This has helped to visualize the future for both families and school education.