Influence of a Centre Leader's Leadership on Workplace Retention among ECEC Teachers and Staffs
： A Multilevel Analysis Focusing on Distributed Leadership

Yoshimi Kobayashi

With the expansion of the supply of childcare, assuring the quality of early childhood education and care (ECEC) has become a social issue, and the chronic shortage of human resources for childcare has become an obstacle to resolving these issues. Therefore, policies to secure ECEC teachers and staffs have been implemented in earnest since 2013. However, official statistics and previous studies of the childcare labour sector indicate that the problem of inter-workplace transfers is like a 'chain reaction of vacancies' and is far from being resolved. In addition, in response to the shortage of workers, a policy has been implemented to improve the treatment of ECEC teachers and staffs by linking their years of experience and training to a financial support scheme through the facilities. In other words, measures are being made to expand the quantity and quality of childcare in a way that emphasises the leadership demonstrated by centre managers and leaders. However, an overview of the environment surrounding the childcare labour sector shows that since the late 1990s, the functions and expertise required of each facility have expanded, revealing a shortage of workers. As the external and internal environments surrounding organisations become more complex, the importance of centre leader's influence has been pointed out to appropriately control conflicts arising between the views of various stakeholders and to enable adaptations to changes in the external environment. The relationship between the employment behaviour of child care providers and the leadership of centre leaders therefore requires further research.

The shortage of ECEC teachers and staffs has been a social problem since the 1960s, and there has been an accumulation of research on various factors that lead to turnover. However, the subjects of this research have been child care providers who are currently working at centres, latent child care providers who have left the workplace and centre leaders and managers of facilities. However, the factors that determine employment behaviour have not yet been sufficiently examined by linking individual caregivers and staffs with factors at the organisational level, such as the overall atmosphere and culture of the workplace derived from the leadership of centre leaders and objective characteristics. Therefore, this study examines the effect of centre leader's leadership as an organisational factor on the retention of individual child care providers in the workplace to solve the social problem of the shortage of child care providers.

Chapter 1 outlines the current situation of the shortage of ECEC teachers and staffs in Japan and the problems that arise from this shortage, and discusses the need to focus on the leadership of centre leaders as a factor in workplace retention. Then, in Chapter 2, to gain a theoretical perspective for the analysis, I review previous studies on the employment behaviour of ECEC teachers and staffs and examine turnover and retention factors specific to ECEC teachers or ECEC

centres. In Chapter 3, the literature is organised with a focus on distributed leadership, whose effectiveness has been pointed out in recent years as a workplace factor surrounding the employment behaviour of ECEC teachers and staffs. Based on these findings, Chapter 4 formulates the research question used herein to examine the relationship between the leadership of centre leaders and the retention of child care providers and other staffs using the concept of distributed leadership. Chapter 5 tests and discusses the operational hypotheses and Chapter 6 presents the discussion and future research prospects.

Why should we focus on the leadership of the centre leaders of ECEC centres to discuss the problem of the shortage of ECEC teachers and staffs in the workplace? To clarify the appropriateness of this research question, Chapter 1 presents a review of the actual situation of the shortage of ECEC teachers and staffs in Japan and the policy trends in response to this shortage by compiling official statistics, materials published by government agencies and the literature of previous studies. The findings of the review show that the shortage of ECEC teachers and staffs in recent years since the implementation of the new child-rearing support system (the new system) has been caused by the problem of inter-workplace transfers that seem to create a chain reaction of vacancies. However, as part of the government's policy to ensure the availability of ECEC teachers and staffs, the system of additional compensation for teachers and staffs has been strengthened to reflect the years of experience and training of ECEC teachers and staffs so that they can be used as portable human capital when transferred to different workplaces. Such a system may be beneficial to ECEC teachers, kitchen staffs and nurses working at the centre by enhancing their professional autonomy and expanding their professional career paths. However, since the operation of the system is left to each facility, there is a trend for each facility to place greater emphasis on the leadership of centre leaders than in the past.

To obtain a theoretical perspective, in Chapter 2, I compare the characteristics of the employment behaviour of ECEC teachers and staffs with those of female general workers. I then summarise the findings of previous studies in terms of the socioeconomic factors that influence employment behaviour and work- and workplace-related factors specific to the childcare profession. First, the number of years of service for ECEC teachers and staffs in Japan, as captured by official statistics, tends to increase in correlation with trends in the employment behaviour of women in general. However, compared to the average for number of years of service of female workers, the numbers of service of ECEC teacher have tended to be shorter ever since the 1970s. The reasons for this are discussed from two perspectives social and economic factors. The first, this is about the institutional problem that it did not increase beyond an average of 10 years of service for the ECEC teachers, seen in the private facility salary improvement expenses in the old system until the new comprehensive support system for children and childcare system was implemented (Matsumoto & Takada, 2013). The second, problem of the social evaluation of the childcare profession, symbolised by the viewpoint that 'there was not much pursuit of the meaning of female ECEC teachers' job continuity and accumulation of childcare experience' (Nakata, 2003: 103).

In addition, the paper summarises the turnover and retention of ECEC teachers and staffs extracted from previous studies in terms of (1) human relations, (2) role ambiguity and autonomy, (3) organisational size, (4) working conditions and (5) leadership. As a result, we gained an analytical perspective on the concept of distributed leadership, which has been increasingly studied since 2000 in relation to job satisfaction and organisational commitment among school teachers and ECEC teachers.

   What is 'distributed leadership', and why has it recently gained attention in school and centre management research? Also, how can distributed leadership function as a mechanism to increase job satisfaction among school teachers and ECEC teachers and staffs? Chapter 3 discusses back to the research of the human relations school (e.g. Argyris, 1957=1970; Likert, 1961) that generated the theory of 'participative leadership' to understand the scheme of the distributed leadership concept, and clarifies the social context in which it was applied in the management of industrial real world. We examine the social background that led to its application in the education and childcare fields and identify the preconditions for its effective functioning. The findings show that the participatory management scheme, which forms the core of distributed leadership, has been valued as a leadership method that motivates workers to voluntarily expand their jobs by allowing all workers in the organisation to participate in managerial decision-making. This scheme leads to job satisfaction and productivity improvement. An overview of the social background that triggered the use of distributed leadership in key industries, school management, centres and other societies in Europe, the U.S. and Japan shows that employers and society have expanded the quantity and quality of duties required of workers. For example, distributed leadership methods in school management research came into focus in Europe and the U.S. because of the social background of neo-liberal educational reforms since the 1990s, which required quality assurance and accountability based on standardised test scores (Hallinger, 2003; Marks & Printy, 2003). The studies of the effective leadership in the ECEC confirmed that the quantitative expansion of childcare services through a childcare system reform and the development of quality assurance policies formed the background for the rise of the distributed leadership concept in the United Kingdom around 2000 (Siraj-Blatchford & Hallet, 2014=2017). Therefore, the reason why distributed leadership has been attracting attention in the management and operation of centres in recent years is that it is expected to increase the synergistic effect of the organisation as a whole and the job satisfaction of the individual by allowing each member to autonomously demonstrate their job expertise in response to the various demands for job expansion.

   Chapter 3 outlines three conditions under which distributed leadership can function in the education and childcare fields: (1) each member in the workplace must have the habit of continuously and voluntarily learning from each other for professional improvement, (2) the distributed leadership concept encompasses the transformational leadership style of the leader; and (3) a vertical relationship of trust is required between the top and subordinate groups in the workplace and a horizontal relationship of trust within each practice group.

Based on the findings of the above distributed leadership concept, Chapter 4 presents five major perspectives as the research questions (RQs) set by the empirical analysis. The first RQ aims to clarify whether the decentralised-oriented leadership of centre leaders at the organisational level (Level 2) works effectively for the retention of ECEC teachers and staffs, even after controlling for the objective characteristics of individuals and organisations. The second RQ focuses on the 'directional leadership' that composed of two leadership action which clear expression of the centre's vision that is emphasised in 'transformational leadership' included in the concept of distributed leadership, and the horizontal consideration that encourages participation in the decision-making of the centre. In other word, as RQ2, examine whether centre leaders' directional leadership practices are reducing conflicts among workplace members and improving retention. The third RQ elucidates the effect of centre leader's pedagogical leadership to ensure continuous professional learning on the retention of ECEC teachers and staffs and the moderation effect of salary satisfaction. The fourth RQ determines the effect of relational trust (RT) within the practice groups in which ECEC teachers and staffs perform their daily duties on individual retention. The fifth RQ demonstrates that the leadership of the centre leaders in fostering this RT – by increasing the autonomy of each group in their practice – leads to individual retention.

Chapter 4 describes the general framework of the empirical analysis, in which 'organisational commitment' – which captures the attachment of ECEC teachers and staffs to the organisation, and 'turnover intention' – which captures the degree of job satisfaction or dissatisfaction and is said to be the antecedent of organisational commitment, are used as dependent variables. Then, independent variables such as centre leader's leadership and RT of practice groups are subjected to a multilevel analysis in which they are putted into the regression equation distinguish at the individual level (Level 1) and organizational level (Level 2). In doing so, objective organizational and individual characteristics and the individual, as well as perceptions of job conditions, based on the knowledge accumulated through the ECEC teacher's research on turnover and retention, are put in as control variables. The data for this analysis were obtained via a questionnaire answered by 88 centre leaders and 802 ECEC teachers and staff members of licenced day care centres and integrated centre for early childhood education and care in November 2020.

The leadership indicators for centre leaders are based on the four frameworks and eight models presented by Siraj-Blatchford and Hallet (2014, 2017) because the authors include the concept of distributed leadership and discuss the effective leadership behaviour of centre leaders. Siraj-Blatchford and Hallet (2014, 2017) also developed their own concept of transformational distributed leadership (TDL). To be consistent with the characteristics of transformational leadership of top leaders in school management and organisations (Podsakoff *et al.*, 1990; Yu *et al.*, 2002; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006). (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006), we developed our own TDL measurement items. To measure RT created by formal and informal leaders in practice groups, we referred to Edwards-Groves *et al.* (2016) and Edwards-Groves and Grootenboe's (2021) measure of RT, which is a seven-item measure consisting of five dimensions: interpersonal trust, interactional trust, intersubjective

trust, intellectual trust and pragmatic trust.

The First, we describe the consideration of the effect of TDL by centre leaders related to the validation results of RQ1, and the effect of RT within the practice group based on the validation results of RQs 4 and 5.

Before examining the RQ, the assumption is that the age, years of service and work hours, including overtime and take-home work, of individual ECEC teachers and staffs affect individual retention indicators. In addition, intra-workplace disparities in 'salary satisfaction' and a work environment that allows employees to take maternity and childcare leave without psychological burden have a positive effect on the retention of teachers and staffs. Job clarity, which is defined as the clarity of the scope of one's duties and the sense of usefulness in one's work, also has a positive effect on the retention of ECEC teachers and staffs. Even after accounting for the influence of individual and organisational objective characteristics and perceptions of job conditions, the results of RQ1 showed that the higher the positive perception of TDL among centre leaders, the higher the retention index of individual ECEC teachers and staffs. Intraclass correlation coefficients (ICC) for centre leaders' TDL in each school suggested that about 30% of the variance in the entire sample could be explained by differences among the schools.

However, a comparison of the coefficient values between group leader's RT and TDL suggests that RT tends to have a greater influence. The participated and distributed leadership concept suggests that workers feel satisfaction through exercising leadership based on their individual expertise within each group, where they practice their daily duties, which leads to job satisfaction and organisational commitment. Therefore, the top leader delegates autonomy to each practice group in terms of role assignment and goal setting, and the group leader has emphasized being the connecting pin for leadership based on each member's expertise (Likert, 1961). In this study's results of hypothesis testing derived from these findings, RT had a significant mediating effect on retention indicators by increasing their job clarity about education and care practices, which had a positive effect on retention indicators. ECEC teachers and staffs feel satisfaction through exercising leadership based on their individual expertise within each group, where they practice their daily duties, which leads to job satisfaction and organisational commitment. Therefore, However, among the factors that have been given as reasons for turnover in the past, employers need to address employees' dissatisfaction with salaries and difficulty taking maternity and childcare leave. The results of this study showed that the TDL by centre leaders had a significant mediating effect on the retention index by having a positive effect on these working condition issues. Based on the results of RQ4 and RQ5, it can be concluded that the centre leaders' delegation of autonomy for 'practice' to the front-line group leaders is effective in promoting individual retention and that centre leader's leadership is responsible for raising awareness about working conditions.

Second, the results of the verification of RQ2 indicate that directional leadership by centre leaders reduces conflicts in the workplace. First, as an effect of intra-workplace conflicts, the relationship between perceptions of compensation, such as 'satisfaction with salary' and 'realisation of grants for

salary improvements', and workplace retention was affected by differences in perceptions within the workplace, not by differences in the average among the centre (Level 2). This result suggests that the pecking order within the organisation based on the new positions and compensation created by the Additional Allowance for Improved Treatment II, which was established as part of the government's measures to secure human resources, may be failing to acknowledge the turnover of those who do not benefit from the system.

The results of this study also suggest that the phenomenon of low organisational commitment due to relatively low satisfaction with salary may be addressed by a significant moderation effect between the centre leader's clarity of vision and directional leadership, which creates an atmosphere in which opinions can be expressed. An organisational structure that allows all members to participate in the decision-making of the school forms the basis of the distributed leadership concept, which can lead to disharmony in communication. Therefore, the findings suggest that giving meaning to and framing a complex and ambiguous situation, consciously or unconsciously, through the leader's daily actions and statements facilitates communication among various stakeholders (Siraj-Blatchford & Hallet, 2014, 2017). We confirmed the mediating effect of clarity of vision on retention indicators through an 'atmosphere for voicing opinions' and that centre leaders' clarity of vision fully mediated the 'atmosphere in which opinions can be expressed' and thus suppressed turnover intention.

Overall, the results of RQ2 indicate that in the current situation, where the hierarchisation of positions and compensation and the diversification of duties are progressing in tandem with the development of human capital through training, the inclusion of words and actions that encourage the participation of various members in decision-making and consider horizontality in the behaviour of presenting the vision of centre leaders is effective in reducing conflicts in the workplace.

The discussion in the last part of the paper validates the results of RQ3, focusing on the function of pedagogical leadership by centre leaders to ensure continuous learning in the profession. Previous researches on the distributed leadership concept have emphasised that creating continuous and voluntary learning habits among ECEC teachers and staffs themselves can enhance professional interactions and lead to job satisfaction (Elmore, 2000; Spillane *et al.*, 2004; Thornton & Cherrington, 2014). The analysis in this study found that the pedagogical leadership of centre leaders which are recognised at the organisational (Level 2) and individual level (Level 1), had a significant positive impact on the organisational commitment of ECEC teachers and staffs. the pedagogical leadership is a composite variable consisting of two items, 'support for participation in professional development training', 'support to encourage reflection through recording of practice, dialogue, etc.'.

However, an analysis of the two items that constitute pedagogical leadership in relation to organisational commitment found that the variable 'support for training participation' at the organisational level (Level 2) did not necessarily increase individuals' organisational commitment. Instead, it was found that increasing the level of 'support for reflection' at both the organisational

and individual level (Level1), which asks about the level of support for maintaining expertise through records and time for reflection that are highly relevant to daily work, had a positive impact on individual retention indicators.

The Additional Allowance for Improved Treatment II, which is part of the government's measures to secure human resources, is a scheme that increases job rank and treatment in conjunction with participation in career advancement training. However, barriers to participation exist to training in the current situation of labour shortages, such as replacement personnel and time (OECD, 2020). The results of the analysis in this study suggest that to support the stable retention of ECEC teachers and staffs in the workplace, it is important that policies and organisational management include a scheme that enables the evaluation of efforts, such as incorporating professional development measures, documentation and reflection through dialogue and reflection, as part of the work.

The impact of pedagogical leadership (Level 2) on organizational commitment differs depending on the level of individual salary satisfaction, with a greater impact of pedagogical leadership by the centre leaders in the group with the top of salary satisfaction compared to the middle group (refer to people who are more than bottom 25%, less than top 25% of the salary satisfaction). However, in the group with the greatest dissatisfaction with their salaries s (the bottom 25% of salary satisfaction group), the influence of pedagogical leadership was also greater than that of the middle group. These results suggest that the higher the pedagogical leadership average (Level2) in the ECEC centre, the more organisational commitment is suppressed when salary satisfaction declines from the top to the middle group. On the other hand, for the group that is dissatisfied with their salaries, organisational commitment is maintained by pedagogical leadership as a park culture that is fostered through participation in training and support for reflection. In any case, for a high level of support in creating an organisation with members who continuously and spontaneously learn from each other to function effectively for retention, it is necessary to maintain and improve individual salary satisfaction. However, since labour costs in childcare are regulated by official prices, there is a limit to whether the efforts of centre leaders and management corporations can achieve a balance in salary satisfaction within the workplace. The effect of directional leadership by the centre leaders and leadership in education is adjusted by the satisfaction level of individual salaries.

In Chapter 6, the final chapter, I reconfirm the academic significance of distinguishing between centre-level (Level 2) variables, such as working conditions and centre leader's leadership indicators, and inter-individual variation within organisations (Level1 variables), such as length of service and satisfaction, and their impact on retention indicators. In addition, many empirical studies using the analytical perspective of distributed leadership have focused on large corporations or schools above the elementary school level. This study is significant in that it reveals that centre leader's TDL positively affects individual retention, even in the centre, where the organisational size is smaller than the target groups of previous studies and the gender balance in the workplace is overwhelmingly skewed towards women. The findings of the quantitative analysis also showed that

it is necessary to transform the organisation into one in which individual ECEC teachers and staffs can exercise autonomous leadership to achieve stable workplace retention, which is significant as an analytical perspective for retention research at ECEC centres.

　Future research could clarify what kinds of situations, such as the structure of proficiency among members or the socio-economic situation in which the organisation is located, generate distributed leadership. In addition, performing a longitudinal analysis of the relationship between leadership practice and individual employment behaviour will contribute to the creation of workplaces where diverse professionals can continue to work and to the derivation of policy implications for the improvement of the national minimum.