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Child-Centered and Teacher-Directed Practices in Two Different Countries: A Descriptive Case Study in Finnish and Japanese Grade 1 Classrooms

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ABSTRACT

This descriptive case study examined how teaching practices were evidenced in Grade 1 classrooms in two different cultural and educational contexts, Finland and Japan. Teachers' teaching practices were video-recorded in 53 classrooms in Finland and six classrooms in Japan and rated with the Early Childhood Classroom Observation Measure by trained investigators. Four Finnish teachers and two Japanese teachers having the highest scores in either child-centered or teacher-directed practices were selected for a descriptive case study to take a closer look at how teaching practices in terms of management, climate, and instruction are evidenced in authentic classroom situations. The analysis revealed some similarities and disparities in how teacher-directed and child-centered practices are reflected in classroom situations in the two countries. For example, in Japan, teachers favoring child-centered practices asked more open-ended questions and encouraged brainstorming and group discussions, whereas the Finnish teachers emphasized socio-emotional skills. The results suggest that cultural values may play a role in how teachers create a positive climate, implement instruction, and organize activities in the classroom.

International evidence demonstrates the relevance of the quality of teaching practices for student outcomes in different areas of learning (e.g., Ansari & Pianta, 2018; Cheng & Chen, 2022). It is widely acknowledged that the way in which teachers interact with their students, organize activities and manage behavior in the classroom, and implement instruction, that is, teaching practices, plays an important role in children's learning and development (e.g., Kikas et al., 2018; Lerkkanen et al., 2016; Pakarinen & Kikas, 2019; Perry et al., 2007; Tang, Kikas, et al., 2017). When discussing teaching practices supportive to children's learning, we can broadly distinguish between child-centered (e.g., constructivist) approaches and teacher-directed (e.g., didactic) approaches. The two teaching practices differ in terms of the quality and amount of instruction provided by the teacher, the specific classroom management practices, and the socio-emotional climate of the classroom (Stipek & Byler, 2004). Although these two teaching approaches have been widely investigated, the knowledge concerning how these practices are reflected in teacher behaviors in authentic classrooms in different cultural and educational contexts is limited (see Huang et al., 2019; Li et al., 2020; Yin et al., 2020, as exceptions). A better understanding of teaching practices across different educational and cultural contexts is needed for finding diverse ways to support best practices in authentic classrooms. Thus, the current study aimed to shed light on how child-centered and teacher-directed practices are reflected in Grade 1 teacher behaviors in two very different cultural and educational contexts, Finland and Japan. The

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present study focused on teaching practices in Grade 1 classrooms, as the beginning of formal schooling lays an important foundation for children's future academic success and attitudes toward schooling (Entwisle et al., 2005; Kim & Morrison, 2018). The study contributes to the previous literature by using a descriptive case study approach and being also among the first attempts to apply an internationally validated observational instrument in Japanese elementary school classrooms.

Literature review

The child-centered and teacher-directed approaches

The child-centered and teacher-directed approaches for teaching practices were originally introduced for explaining the differences in teacher behaviors in the early childhood and early school years classrooms in the United States (Stipek & Byler, 2004). Child-centered practices are based on the work of both Piaget and Vygotsky, who acknowledged children as the active constructors of knowledge and emphasized their prior understanding and experiences as a starting point for learning (see Bransford et al., 2000, for an overview). Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory also emphasizes the importance of cultural and social context for learning process. Child-centered practices are characterized by a reliance on the professional guidelines for "developmentally appropriate practices" (DAP; Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). Teachers who employ child-centered (e.g., learner-centered; Cornelius-White, 2007) practices value children's interests and initiatives in their teaching and encourage their autonomy when implementing instruction (Lerkkanen et al., 2016; Stipek & Byler, 2004). This aligns with the propositions of autonomy-supportive teaching (Reeve & Cheon, 2021). Teachers using child-centered practices also provide opportunities for meaningful peer interactions and support the development of children's social skills (Stipek & Byler, 2004) alongside their academic achievement.

In contrast, teacher-directed (e.g., didactic) practices are based on behaviorism and traditional learning theories emphasizing drill and practice and assuming that basic skills should be acquired before moving on to more advanced learning (e.g., Stipek & Byler, 2004; Stipek, 2004). Teachers relying on teacher-directed practices make the most of their decisions in the classroom, control the instructional activities, and emphasize the acquisition of basic skills and rote learning in their instruction, according to Stipek and Byler (2004). They also found that teachers employing teacher-directed practices follow, more or less, their own agenda, and there is typically no room for students' initiatives or the individualization of instruction in the classroom. For example, all the children do the same exercises despite their academic skills and individual needs. Teacher-directed practices are based on the assumption that the teacher must be in absolute control, which is seen as the adoption of a teacher-focused authoritarian attitude (Reeve & Cheon, 2021). As opposite to constructivism, teacher-directed approaches also have been referred to as instructivism (Huang et al., 2019; Yin et al., 2020).

Previous studies on teaching practices

Previous studies have demonstrated that the two teaching approaches relate differently to students' motivation, social skills, and academic skills development. Child-centered practices have been found to be positively associated with students' reading skills (Lerkkanen et al., 2016; Perry et al., 2007; Tang, Kikas, et al., 2017), math skills (Pakarinen & Kikas, 2019; Perry et al., 2007), retrospective perceptions of emotional support from the teacher (Kikas & Tang, 2019), perceptions of academic performance (Perry et al., 2007), and learning motivation (Kikas et al., 2018; Lerkkanen et al., 2012; Perry et al., 2007). Furthermore, child-centered teaching practices relate to reduced instances of problem behavior and peer rejection in children (Donohue et al., 2003). Rao et al. (2012) showed in a Chinese sample that children with developmentally appropriate preschool experiences had higher school readiness scores compared with other children. Similarly, Perry et al. (2007) demonstrated that a higher

percentage of Grade 1 students in classrooms where teachers were observed to use child-centered teaching practices met the academic standards. Furthermore, Cheng and Chen (2022) indicated that student-perceived student-centered instruction in Chinese secondary school classrooms related to students' academic motivation and learning behaviors; the relations, however, differed by the grade.

Results regarding the benefits of teacher-directed practices, in turn, are less consistent. Studies have shown that teacher-directed practices relate negatively to students' academic motivation (Lerkkanen et al., 2012; Stipek et al., 1995) and academic skills development (Kikas et al., 2018; Tang et al., 2019), particularly for children with high initial academic skills (Lerkkanen et al., 2016). However, other studies have indicated that teacher-directed practices are beneficial for advancing children's academic skills (Stipek et al., 1995, 1998), particularly among children who have poor initial skills (Huffman & Speer, 2000). Moreover, Kikas et al. (2014) demonstrated that teacher-directed practices are beneficial in terms of children's task-focused behavior in classrooms where many children have difficulties staying focused and working persistently.

Although several studies document linkages between teaching practices and student outcomes, it remains unclear how teaching practices are evidenced in authentic classrooms in different educational and cultural contexts. To the best of our knowledge, the Early Childhood Classroom Observation Measure (ECCOM) assessing teaching practices has been used thus far in preschool and primary school classrooms in the United States (Daniels, 2014; Perry et al., 2007; Stipek & Byler, 2004), China (Rao et al., 2012), Estonia (Kikas et al., 2014; Kimer et al., 2016; Pakarinen & Kikas, 2019), Finland (Lerkkanen et al., 2012, 2016; Tang, Pakarinen, et al., 2017), and Switzerland (Van Loon et al., 2021). The existing studies have shown that child-centered practices predominate in Finnish kindergarten and early primary school classrooms (Lerkkanen et al., 2012, 2016; Tang, Pakarinen, et al., 2017). The existing studies, however, are quantitative in nature and do not provide a detailed description of how different teaching practices are evidenced in teachers' provision of management, climate, and instruction.

Concerning Japan, studies on observed classroom practices are rare, and this study represents the first attempts to use the ECCOM to observe teaching practices in Japanese classrooms. It has been indicated that although research into the quality of early childhood classrooms has a long history in Japan, which has mainly focused on teachers' professional development, evidence that shows changes and development of the quality of teaching practices is lacking in the literature (Akita et al., 2007). However, in an effort to fill in this gap, a recent study by Fujisawa and Nakamuro (2017) quantitatively measured Japanese classroom environment in early childhood education using the Infant and Toddler Environment Rating Scale-Revised (ITERS-R; Harms et al., 2003) with much younger children. They found that high scores in ITERS-R positively associated with children's adaptive development.

Teachers' understanding of the best practices, as well as their beliefs about how children learn, have received increasing attention in recent years (Ansari & Pianta, 2019; Li et al., 2020). Teachers' beliefs and knowledge guide the selection and implementation of their instructional methods, which, in turn, influence student outcomes. Moreover, it has been proposed that the culture in which the teacher lives and works influences what kind of instruction represents "best practices" (Lee & Tseng, 2008; Oyserman & Lee, 2008; Yang & Li, 2018) and what kind of child behaviors are culturally appropriate (Lee & Tseng, 2008). Li et al. (2020) indicated that a combination of direct instruction and constructive pedagogical interaction were conveyed in Hong Kong kindergartens. Furthermore, there have been debates on cultural influences on child-centered practices (Fallace, 2015; Huang et al., 2019; Lee & Tseng, 2008). It has been shown that teachers in hierarchical cultures tend to prioritize group needs and authority over individual needs and individual agency (Reeve & Cheon, 2021). Teachers from East-Asian countries, for example, might perform student-centered practices somewhat differently in comparison to their Western counterparts (Cheng & Chen, 2022; Li et al., 2020). It also has been argued that a belief-practice gap may exist, as East-Asian teachers might value participatory teaching and have child-centered beliefs and but still deploy teacher-directed practices (Huang et al., 2019; Li et al., 2020).

The present study

The current article takes an in-depth look at the pedagogical choices teachers make in delivering instruction in authentic classrooms representing different school systems, educational policies, and cultural values. The current study aims to increase our understanding of the role that the sociocultural context may play in teaching practices in two diverse countries: Finland and Japan. The two countries represent two different sociocultural contexts with unique cultural values (i.e., individualistic and collectivistic, respectively) that are also likely to frame the emphases and expectations toward children's learning and development through teaching practices (e.g., Markus & Kitayama, 2010). Finland represents the Nordic individualist (also referred to as independent or autonomous; see Markus & Kitayama, 2010) culture, where the goal of education and child rearing is characterized by supporting a child's individuality and autonomy in relation to socialization goals. Japan, in turn, can be seen as representing the East-Asian collectivist (also interdependent or relational) culture (Markus & Kitayama, 2010), where the goal of education and upbringing is supporting the child's goals and beliefs aligned to the relational socialization expectations of the other people and wider society.

The present study aimed to investigate how teaching practices are evidenced in actual classroom situations in Grade 1 classrooms in two different countries, Finland and Japan. The two countries, however, have many differences in their educational systems. In Finland, the school year begins in the middle of August and ends in the last week of May of the following year. Children attend kindergarten in the year they turn 6 and start comprehensive school one year later (in the year they turn 7). Compulsory education consists of six years of elementary school and three years of junior high school. The class size in Grade 1 is typically relatively small (on average, 19.6 students in Grade 1; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2021). In the first school year, the curriculum emphasizes basic academic skills, such as reading and arithmetic (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2014). In addition, the curriculum consists of environmental studies, music, arts and crafts, physical education, religion, and integrated studies. Also, social and generic study skills are at the core of teaching practices (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2014), as learners need to develop social competence for effective interaction and learning. In Finland, teachers are considered highly valued academic professionals and enjoy public respect. Even today, becoming a classroom teacher is one of the most popular career paths for youth. In addition, it is difficult to get into a teacher education program: only 15% of all applicants to primary teacher education programs in Finnish universities are admitted (Pollari et al., 2018). Finland does not have classroom inspectors or super-visors, but school principals act as pedagogical leaders and provide teachers with trust and steering, instead of control. Teachers are encouraged to collaborate with their peers, constantly mentoring and tutoring each other (Haapaniemi et al., 2021). Although Finnish teachers must follow the national core curriculum, they have a great deal of autonomy when it comes to its implementation. Teachers can choose the methods and materials themselves as well as the assessment methodologies (Haapaniemi et al., 2021; Pollari et al., 2018). In Finland, classroom teachers have five years of university level training and receive a master's degree in education. Classroom teachers usually teach all subjects to their students. Children often have the same classroom teacher for several years during their primary school education.

In Japan, the school year begins on April 1 and ends on March 31 of the following year. A child who turns 6 years old by April 1 of the same year becomes a first-year elementary school student. Compulsory education consists of six years of elementary school and three years of junior high school. High school is not compulsory, but the advancement rate is 98.8% (2021). The regulation for the maximum class size of 35 students in Grade 1 was initiated in 2021. The curriculum for Grade 1 consists of Japanese language, math, living environmental studies, music, arts and crafts, physical education, moral education, and a period for integrated studies. Classroom teachers usually teach all subjects. Most elementary school teachers have a four-year bachelor's degree (88.1%), with only 4.9% having completed a graduate degree (MA and PhD) and 6.6% having a two-year junior college degree

(Statistics of Japan, 2019). To maintain the equality of the education, the Japanese government set the Course of Study, which prescribes standards for all school curriculum and the standard number of class hours for each subject and grade. Usually, teachers report to school leaders whether the number of class hours is fulfilled according to the curriculum based on the Course of Study. Since 2012, the learner-centered approach has been emphasized in the Course of Study (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology MEXT, 2012), and active learning, including group work, debate, and group discussion, has been acknowledged as a tool to promote learner-centered lessons (Kawamura & Musashi, 2016). The content to be taught at each grade level is determined by MEXT. The textbooks used are certified by MEXT. However, teachers are free to implement their own teaching methods. In Japan, 75% of teachers report having control over determining course content in their class, compared to 84% on average across the OECD countries and economies participating in TALIS study (OECD, 2020). In Japan, teachers reporting higher levels of control over their class are more likely to report working in innovative school environments.

To better understand the context in which the teaching practices take place, the influence of culture in curricular and teaching approaches should be addressed (Cheng & Chen, 2022; Huang et al., 2019; Yang & Li, 2018; Yin et al., 2020). One perspective from which to understand culture is the horizontal and vertical perspective. Horizontal cultures value social equality, while vertical cultures appreciate hierarchy. Together with individualistic and collectivistic cultures, Triandis (2001) introduces four classifications: horizontal individualism, vertical individualism, horizontal collectivism, and vertical collectivism. Finnish culture is described as one of horizontal individualism, focusing on self-concepts that are autonomous from a group. The self is independent and identical to the self of others. Vertical individualism cultures – like the United States – value standing out and being the best in comparison to others. The self is independent, but different from the self of others. Being an in-group member and identifying as such are characteristics of horizontal collectivism cultures, although the status of the in-group member is not unique from that of others. Japan is characterized as a vertical collectivism culture, which emphasizes the hierarchy of the in-group and values strong leadership and authority. Usually, the group's goals are prioritized over personal goals. Social behavior is predicted from norms, duties, and obligations.

Over the previous years, the education systems of Finland and Japan have been admired worldwide for spearheading performance in education and results in international assessments. Although there are differences in the education systems and cultures between these two countries, children's academic achievement has been relatively high in both Finland and Japan. For example, in the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study [TIMSS] survey of 4th-grade students, Japan consistently ranked in the top five among the countries surveyed from 1995 to 2019 in both math and science (Mullis et al., 2020). In the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment [PISA] 2018 survey (OECD, 2019a; 2019b), students in both Finland and Japan scored higher than the OECD average in reading, mathematics, and science. Although Finland was ranked higher than Japan in reading and Japan was ranked higher than Finland in mathematics, they were ranked at the same level in science.

Method

Participants

Finnish sample

The Finnish teachers were selected from a larger data pool of 53 Grade 1 teachers who participated in a follow-up study (Lerkkanen & Pakarinen, 2016-2022). Teachers' (94.1% female) average work experience was 16.54 years (SD = 9.31). The class sizes varied from seven to 25 (M = 19.25, SD = 4.40) students per classroom. This reflects the typical class size in Finland in Grade 1 (OECD, 2021). Four teachers were selected for the case study after comparing their ECCOM scores with the sample mean: two teachers having the highest scores in child-centered practices and two teachers having the highest

scores in teacher-directed practices in the sample were selected for a closer investigation. A researcher transcribed three lessons from each teacher and conducted qualitative analysis based on the transcribed lessons as blind without knowing their actual ECCOM scores.

Japanese sample

Two Japanese teachers were selected from a larger data pool of six teachers. The six teachers were chosen for the study by local school authorities as teachers with good classroom instruction. Of the six teachers, four were female and two were male. The mean age of the teachers was 46.22 years ($SD =$ 10.05) and their average work experience was 20.73 years ($SD = 8.28$). The mean number of students in the class was 31.00 ($SD = 4.56$), which is close to the average class size in Japan (OECD, 2021). One teacher having the highest scores in child-centered practices and one teacher having the highest scores in teacher-directed practices were selected for the case study for a closer investigation based on their ECCOM scores. Two researchers conducted the descriptive analysis of the teaching practices of those two teachers independently from each other without knowing their actual ECCOM scores.

Procedure

Finland

In Finland, the approval from the university's ethics board was received prior to commencement of the study. School principals and teachers were first contacted in order to inform them of the larger study and invite them to participate. Participation was voluntary, and the participants could cancel their participation at any stage. Written consent forms were received from participating teachers. In addition, parents were asked to submit a written informed consent for their child's participation in the study because of the video-recordings in the classroom.

Teaching practices were video-recorded and analyzed using the ECCOM instrument (Stipek & Byler, 2004, 2005; see Lerkkanen et al., 2012; Tang, Pakarinen, et al., 2017, for validation in the Finnish context). In Finland, there were three researchers (MA students of education) who were carefully trained with six-hour onsite training. The observers had to attain a certain level of reliability (80%, within one scale point) before conducting the actual observations. Each class was video-recorded for three lessons (approximately 45 minutes) on a normal school day. The observers made notes while watching the videos and provided their ratings only after watching all the lessons of each teacher.

Japan

Japanese classrooms were selected by local school authorities. School principals and teachers were contacted in order to inform them of the purpose, content, and procedure of the study and invited to participate. In Japan, classroom practices were video-recorded and analyzed using the ECCOM (Stipek & Byler, 2005). Two PhD students of education were carefully prepared in the same onsite training as the Finnish observers. Thus, it was ensured that they had a similar understanding of the teaching practices as the Finnish observers. Each class was video-recorded for two lessons (one math and one reading lesson, approximately 45 minutes) during normal school days. The observers made notes while watching the videos and provided their ratings only after watching all the lessons of each teacher.

Measures

The ECCOM (Stipek & Byler, 2005) instrument was employed to observe teaching practices in Grade 1 classrooms (see Lerkkanen et al., 2012; Tang, Pakarinen, et al., 2017, for validation in educational settings in Finland). The present analyses utilized the ECCOM ratings on the Child-Centered Practices and Teacher-Directed Practices scales. Teaching practices are measured by and consist of three subscales: management, climate, and instruction (Stipek & Byler, 2004; see Lerkkanen et al., 2012, for a detailed description of the instrument). Management consists of items dealing with child responsibility, choice of activities, disciplinary strategies, and instructions for academically related

activities. Climate relates to support for communication and interpersonal skills, student engagement, and individualization of learning activities. Instruction encompasses learning standards, coherence of instructional activities, instructional conversation, and literacy and math instruction. Ratings were provided on a five-point scale based on the percentage of time the described practices were observed (1 = practices are rarely seen, 0–20% of the time, to 5 = practices predominate, 80–100% of the time). Each teacher received two scores for each item: one for Child-Centered Practices and one for Teacher-Directed Practices. The detailed procedure and factor structure in primary school classrooms have been reported in a previous study by Tang, Pakarinen, et al. (2017).

Analysis strategy

Analyses were carried out with the following steps. First, the video-recordings of Finnish and Japanese Grade 1 teachers were analyzed with the ECCOM instrument. Second, one Japanese teacher and two Finnish teachers having the highest scores in child-centered practices and one Japanese teacher and two Finnish teachers having the highest scores in teacher-directed practices were selected for a closer investigation based on their ECCOM scores. The descriptive statistics of teaching practices of Finnish and Japanese classroom teachers are shown in Table 1. Video-recordings of those teachers were further analyzed qualitatively to describe how teaching practices in terms of management, climate, and instruction were evidenced in authentic classroom situations in the two different countries. The observations of teacher practices are reported separately for Finnish and Japanese classroom teachers in Tables 2 and 3.

Limitations

Some limitations of this study should be noted. One potential limitation was the somewhat different sample and procedure used for the two countries. In Finland, the larger sample consisted of 53 Grade 1 teachers, and in Japan, the sample consisted of six teachers. The Finnish teachers were part of a larger study whereas in Japan, the classrooms were selected by local school authorities. Although descriptive case study does not aim at generalizations, cautious is warranted in making country-specific

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of Finnish ($n = 53$) and Japanese ($n = 6$) teachers' teaching practices.

	Child-centered practices		Teacher-directed practices	
	Finnish teachers M (SD)	Japanese teachers M (SD)	Finnish teachers M (SD)	Japanese teachers M (SD)
Management	3.11 (0.75)	3.47 (1.13)	2.76 (0.79)	2.54 (1.43)
Child responsibility	3.55 (0.95)	3.50 (1.38)	2.49 (0.97)	2.33 (1.51)
Management	3.32 (0.92)	3.50 (1.38)	2.64 (1.00)	2.33 (1.51)
Choice of activities	2.62 (1.00)	2.67 (1.63)	3.34 (0.96)	3.50 (1.52)
Discipline strategies	3.32 (0.92)	4.00 (1.55)	2.57 (0.89)	2.00 (1.55)
Relevance of activities to children	2.57 (1.05)	3.00 (0.89)	-	-
Teacher warmth and responsiveness	3.30 (0.91)	4.17 (1.60)	-	-
Climate	3.09 (0.86)	3.50 (1.41)	2.74 (0.90)	2.29 (1.47)
Support for communication skills	3.32 (1.00)	4.00 (1.67)	2.74 (1.00)	2.00 (1.67)
Individualization of learning activities	2.94 (0.82)	3.00 (1.41)	2.83 (0.89)	2.50 (1.38)
Support for interpersonal skills	2.58 (1.13)	2.83 (1.47)	2.98 (1.19)	2.83 (1.72)
Student engagement	3.51 (0.86)	4.17 (1.60)	2.40 (1.12)	1.83 (1.60)
Instruction	2.93 (0.80)	3.90 (1.06)	2.68 (1.03)	2.05 (0.98)
Learning standards	3.40 (0.84)	2.83 (1.33)	2.32 (1.02)	3.00 (1.27)
Coherence of instructional activities	2.53 (0.97)	3.33 (0.82)	3.06 (1.15)	2.67 (0.81)
Teaching concepts	3.15 (1.08)	4.33 (0.82)	2.53 (1.10)	1.67 (0.82)
Instructional conversation	3.08 (1.04)	4.17 (1.60)	2.64 (1.19)	1.83 (1.60)
Literacy instruction	2.73 (1.01)	4.50 (0.84)	2.40 (1.32)	1.17 (0.41)
Math instruction	2.81 (1.01)	4.17 (1.33)	3.06 (1.21)	2.00 (1.27)
Math assessment	2.81 (1.15)	4.00 (1.55)	2.77 (1.20)	2.00 (1.55)
Total score	3.04 (0.75)	3.67 (1.14)	2.72 (0.88)	2.24 (1.20)

Table 2. Descriptive analysis of the Finnish teachers' teaching practices.

Child-centered	Management	Climate	Instruction
Teacher 1	• Children were able to choose their places and move freely in the classroom. • Teacher promoted students' participation, and students were able to make small choices in the class. • Children had age-appropriate responsibilities in classroom. • Teacher monitored students' work. • Teacher made sure that all the children were participating in activities and asked students to comment on each other's answers. • Behavior management was efficient (teacher used gestures and certain signs). • Teacher provided clear instructions and used concrete materials. • Teacher used games, songs, and play to organize the lesson so that children had to focus on a certain task for an age-appropriate time. • Teacher asked students to take a break during the lesson.	• Teacher took students' comments and ideas into account and asked for arguments. Teacher built on students' initiatives. • Teacher promoted peer discussion and used peer work and group work. • Students were encouraged to interact with each other. • Teacher provided general instructions for all the students and individual support for students who needed extra help. • Teacher smiled, used eye contact, and noticed all the students in a class. • Teacher tapped a child on shoulder and gave positive feedback. • Teacher was physically close to the children. • Teacher made sure that all the children were participating in activities and asked them to comment on each other's answers. • Teacher asked students to take a break during the lesson • Teacher modeled that she does not know everything and that the students can teach something to her as well. • Teacher praised students for helping each other. • Teacher referred to the class as "our team."	• Teacher promoted the problem-solving and asked students to think together how to solve the problems. • Teacher promoted peer discussion and used peer work and group work. • Teacher used open-ended questions. • Teacher took students' comments and ideas into account and asked for arguments. • Students were encouraged to interact with each other. • Teacher provided feedback on students' skills and work habits. • The feedback focused on students' engagement and motivation rather than on correct answers. • Teacher asked students to model themselves on the other students rather than on her. • Teacher modeled that she does not know everything and that the students can teach something to her as well. • Teacher provided clear instructions and used concrete materials. • The contents were related to children's lives. The teacher used drama and toys to discuss about peer relationships, bullying, and emotion regulation skills.

(Continued)

Table 2. (Continued).

Child-centered	Management	Climate	Instruction
Teacher 2	• Students were allowed to make small choices during the day. • Students had small responsibilities in the class (two students were assistant teachers). • Students were able to create their own example math problems and decide who could answer. • Behavior management was effective and did not take time from learning. • Instructions were short and clear. • Transitions were smooth. • Children could move around the classroom and choose where to work (e.g., sit on floor).	• Students could ask questions, which were answered during the lesson. • Teacher listened to students' comments and was responsive. • Students could create their own example math problems and decide who could answer. • If a student answered incorrectly, the teacher provided hints and another opportunity to answer. • Teacher paced the teaching appropriately and was aware of the students' individual needs. • Teacher noticed every student in the class. • Teacher made sure that all the students participated in activities and asked for answers from those students who did not raise their hands. • Teacher told things about her own life and used a lot of humor. • Teacher asked the students additional questions. • Students worked in pairs and groups, and they were encouraged to interact and collaborate with each other. • Teacher gave verbal and nonverbal feedback. • Teacher praised students for noticing her mistakes. • Teacher encouraged students to model the behavior of other students rather than hers. • Teacher did not correct students' incorrect answers, but the whole class worked together to determine the right answer.	• Teacher asked children to explain their thinking and did not focus only on the right answer. • Teacher tried to understand the children's thinking and rationale behind their answers. • Teacher did not provide the answer but used scaffolding and encouraged children to think for themselves. • Students could create math problems themselves and decide who would answer. • Teacher used visual cues to support the instruction (e. g., drawing and figures in addition to verbal instructions). • Teacher used a variety of activities that lasted for a short time (literacy lesson had seven and math lesson had six activities). • The themes of the lesson were relevant for students and their lives.

(Continued)

Table 2. (Continued).

Teacher-Directed	Management	Climate	Instruction
Teacher 3	• Students had to finish all the tasks or they had to finish them at home. • Teacher asked questions according to the seating plan. • Students did not have autonomy, and the teacher checked their answers and erased incorrect answers. • Students worked independently, and there was no discussion or collaboration. • Teacher yelled at students, and her tone of voice was harsh. • Students were not allowed to move around. • Teacher sometimes poked students on the shoulder with her finger. • Students had to work with a workbook and handouts for long periods.	• Teacher did not take into account students' comments and ignored students' initiatives for conversation. • Teacher attention was mostly focused on students sitting at the front of the classroom. • Questions could be answered in only one or two words. • Teacher led all the discussions. • Teacher relied on the textbook, and instruction did not have any flexibility (same tasks for all, and the task had to be finished despite of students' tiredness). • Teacher used multiplication tests to find out what the children know. • Students continued working until all the students had finished the tasks. • Teacher was not responsive to the emotional needs of students. • There was not much interaction between students, or interaction was guided by the teacher. • Teacher comments were not supportive.	• All the students were doing the same activity. • Teacher did not take into account students' comments. • Students were not able to participate in problem-solving, and the teacher gave the right answer directly. • Students used an activity book and handouts. • Teacher emphasized the correct answer and not the process. She corrected students' answers. • Teacher asked questions according to seating plan. • Students did not have autonomy, and the teacher checked their answers and erased incorrect answers. • Teacher provided instructions orally and did not use any other materials. • Teacher was pedantic in terms of letter shapes and erased students' letters. • Focus was on basic skills. • Drill and practice were used for instruction of the multiplication table.
Teacher 4	• Teacher had her own agenda that she followed during the lesson. • Teacher focused primarily on her instruction and did not allow any rambling discussion. • Teacher delivered the materials to children and explained the objectives of the lesson. • Students sat in groups. • Instructions were detailed. • Teacher repeatedly used prohibitions to control the class. • Teacher changed the seating of two students because they discussed math problems. • Most of the activities were independent work.	• Students did not have independent choices. • Teacher ignored students' comments and initiatives. • Teacher controlled everything. • Students were not able to start the activities before the teacher gave permission. • Students were able to collaborate with each other, but the teacher determined the groups and students' roles and provided instructions. • Students were not allowed to discuss during the independent work. • Teacher was distant and did not ask how children were doing. • Teacher circulated in the classroom, but she only corrected students' mistakes and made sure that students could proceed.	• Teacher asked closed questions of the students when instructing them individually. • Teacher did not ask questions of the whole group. • Teacher provided the answer to students. • Students had to remember the words and sentences provided by the teacher. • The whole classroom conducted the same tasks in the same order according to teacher instructions. • Students had to wait until all the students finished a certain phase. • Teacher corrected students' answers. • No discussion of the whole group was encouraged. • Students worked with the same activities (e.g, handouts) for a long period. • Teacher emphasized recalling things and remembering things by heart.

Table 3. Descriptive analysis of the Japanese teachers' teaching practices.

Child-centered	Management	Climate	Instruction
	• Students were divided into small groups, and each group had a leader of the day who was responsible for collecting the assignments and bringing them to the teacher as well as leading the discussion.	• Teacher asked students to use friendly phrases instead of aggressive ones.	• Teacher's questions allowed the students to have different answers.
	• Teacher drew attention to good behavior and praised it as a model for the other students. Teacher gave a lot of positive feedback.	• Teacher taught the group leaders how to facilitate the group discussion.	• Students' answers were checked by the other students, not by the teacher.
	• Students sat in groups and discussed the topic with other students in the group. One student of each group presented their answers to the other students.	• Teacher asked about the students' own experiences on the topic. She also used practical examples in teaching.	• Teacher let the students write self-feedback comments.
	• Teacher let the students write self-feedback comments at the end of the lesson.	• Students discussed in small groups how to solve the problems. After discussion in the groups, the representatives of each group presented their ideas to the other students.	• Teacher used pictures to promote children's conceptual understanding.
	• Children continued to check the answers without any instruction even though the teacher left the classroom for a while.	• Children sat face-to-face in groups of four to five.	• Teacher gave the handout to children to engage them in problem-solving.
	• There were classroom rules and routines about how to check the answers.	• Teacher ensured that most children had a turn to speak during the session.	• A child shared her idea about how to count the money. The teacher asked her to repeat it and summarized the idea.
	• When children were doing their own activities, the teacher walked around the class, crouched/sat at the children's level, and gave feedback with eye contact. She helped when students needed individual assistance.	• Teacher told the children to share their answers in front of the class and listen to each other.	• Teacher asked about the students' experiences related to the topic.
	• Classroom rules were shared among the teacher and the students.	• Teacher provided opportunities for group discussion that promoted peer interactions.	• Teacher gave students tasks that promoted their development in zone of proximal development.
	• When children shared their ideas, the teacher responded in a positive way and accepted every comment from the students even if it was incorrect or not related to the topic. Teacher asked for more detailed information.	• Teacher showed an example of how to correct the other children's mistakes in a positive way.	• Teacher used open-ended questions, and the students were able to think about their own answers.
	• If many students wanted to answer the teacher's question, she let the students stand up and listen to all the answers.	• In share time, the other children were able to ask questions.	• If the students did not understand the concept, the teacher asked questions that provided other ways of thinking.
	• Behavior management was brief and did not disturb the other children.	• If many students wanted to answer the teacher's question, she let the students stand up and listen to all the answers.	• Students were sitting in groups and discussed the topics and their answers among the other students in each group.
		• Teacher repeated what the students said and what they felt when they answered.	• The session had a clear consistent theme, and all the activities were related to the theme.
		• Teacher asked questions in order to deepen students' understanding.	• Teacher let all the students read the textbooks simultaneously out loud.
		• Teacher let the students speak to the other students when they were answering questions. Children were able to ask questions of other children.	• Teacher summarized children's answers and brought the group back to discussion about the topic.
		• Teacher connected related comments by different students.	

(Continued)

Table 3. (Continued).

Teacher-Directed	Management	Climate	Instruction
	• Teacher gave detailed instructions about how to prepare for the lesson and did not start the lesson until all the students were ready.	• Although many students wanted to say something and raised their hands, the teacher ignored them most of the time.	• Although many students wanted to say something and raised their hands, the teacher ignored them most of the time.
	• Although many students wanted to say something and raised their hands, the teacher ignored them most of the time.	• Teacher ignored students' comments if they did not fit the topic of the lesson.	• Teacher ignored students' comments if they did not fit the topic of the lesson.
	• Teacher ignored students' comments if they did not fit the topic of the lesson.	• Teacher used fixed instructional materials and the teacher book. The instruction did not have any flexibility.	• Teacher used closed-ended questions most of the time and expected the one (right) answer.
	• Teacher used fixed instructional materials and the teacher book. The instruction did not have any flexibility.	• Teacher did not allow the students to exchange their ideas but told them to think by themselves. The teacher did not allow the students to discuss and told them to be quiet.	• Teacher checked the steps and the answers thoroughly.
	• There were clear rules for appropriate classroom behavior that were shared among the students.	• Teacher used topics that were not directly related to the experiences of the students.	• Teacher used fixed instructional materials and the teacher book. The instruction did not have any flexibility.
	• Teacher used negative expressions to make the students calm down.	• Teacher instructed the students about what and how to write, but not why to write.	• Teacher used figures to promote students' understanding.
	• Teacher used punitive control when the students did not follow the rules.	• Teacher asked mainly closed-ended questions.	• Teacher cut off or ignored children when they initiated conversation.
	• Teacher used a negative tone of voice when some students were late.	• All children did the same tasks. If the task was too easy for some children, they started playing or chatting with other children, which disrupted the other children.	• Teacher corrected students' actions.
	• Instructions were very detailed.	• Children were given few opportunities to speak in front of peers except to respond to direct questions posed by the teacher. There were some children who were speaking loudly all the time because they were not given an opportunity to speak in front of the class.	• All children had to copy the same things from the blackboard.
	• Teacher did not connect the story in the textbook to students' own experiences.	• Teacher was not persistent. When a child could not answer, the teacher did not give any feedback or help and just asked someone else for the right answer.	• Children were required to do same thing.
	• Teacher led all the activities, and the children did not have classroom responsibilities.	• Children spent a lot of time in silent individual work or in teacher-directed groups. There was little time for peer interactions in the classroom.	• Teacher checked students' notebooks whether they wrote correctly or not.
	• When children were doing their own activities, the teacher walked around the class, but gave feedback or helped without eye contact.	• Teacher did not support the students in solving their peer problems by themselves but intervened and provided her solution.	• Children needed to complete the worksheet in the same way.
	• Monitoring was intrusive.	• Teacher highlighted students' comments to draw attention of the other students and share their thoughts.	• There was no integration between subjects.
	• Teacher patted a child who was playing with another child on the back.	• Children had to complete the same worksheet, which had little flexibility.	• Teacher did not create opportunities for the students to have conversation with the other students.
	• Teacher yelled at a child across the room.	• Every student worked on the same activities and materials. The teacher supported the students who needed additional instruction when she walked around the classroom.	• When the students thought about the meaning of a word, the teacher suggested using previous experience and knowledge and finally provided examples existing around them.
	• One child came to the teacher and tried to say something, but the teacher ignored him. The student started to cry, but the teacher still ignored him.		• Teacher asked students to think about how the students would feel if they were a character in a story.
	• Teacher used imperative phrases when she scolded the students.		

comparisons. In Finland, the researcher who conducted the qualitative analysis, conducted some of the ECCOM observations. In Japan, the two researchers were the ones who conducted the ECCOM ratings. Moreover, although this study was a first effort to show the applicability of the ECCOM in a Japanese context, it should be noted that this was a descriptive case study that does not allow generalizations regarding quality of teaching practices in Finland and Japan.

Results

Child-centered teaching practices

The results first indicated that in the Finnish sample (Table 2), teaching practices were evidenced in the roles of teacher and students, classroom climate, sensitivity of the classroom management strategies, and instructional choices of the teacher. Although the two Finnish teachers were rated as deploying the most child-centered practices with the ECCOM instrument, there were some similarities and disparities in how their teaching practices were implemented in actual classroom situations. The students' role was very similar in the lessons of the two teachers who were rated as deploying the most child-centered practices in the Finnish sample. Both teachers took the students' initiatives and interests into account and encouraged their participation in the lessons. The teachers listened to students' ideas even if their initiatives were not always related to instruction but were beyond its scope. Students had some age-appropriate responsibilities in the classroom, and they were encouraged to work in pairs and groups. In classrooms where teaching practices were observed as being child-centered, the teacher's role was rather that of a facilitator of the students' learning. The teachers also provided a lot of positive feedback to students and thereby supported their engagement in learning.

The two teachers employing child-centered practices differed somewhat in terms of the teacher's role and individual choices (e.g., how they showed closeness and approachability to children). The first teacher told students about her personal life and tried to make herself as approachable and close to the students in that way, whereas the second teacher was more physically close to the students and also touched the children. In addition, the second teacher placed more emphasis on socio-emotional skills and emotion regulation in her instruction compared with the first teacher.

The results further indicated that the teacher using child-centered practices the most in the Japanese sample (Table 3) supported students' autonomy to a great extent. For example, the students worked in groups, and each group had the leader of the day with some responsibilities. The teacher promoted students' autonomy, for example, by teaching the group leaders how to facilitate discussion in a group and letting the students correct the mistakes together rather than correcting them herself. The teacher used proactive strategies in behavior management by drawing attention to well-behaving students and praising their behavior as a model for the other students. The teacher also offered a lot of positive feedback to students and asked students to use friendly phrases when talking to each other. The teacher used open-ended questions and encouraged brainstorming and discussion in the groups. The teacher also used the students' own experiences as a starting point of the lesson and connected the topic of the lesson to their actual lives. When children shared their ideas, the teacher responded in a warm and supportive way by accepting their comments even if they were not correct or were not related to the topic.

Teacher-directed teaching practices

Teachers rated as employing the most teacher-directed practices in the Finnish sample resembled each other in the teacher's role (Table 2). The teachers were the authoritative figures in the classroom, led all the activities, and chose the contents of the lesson. They strictly followed their own agenda. The student's role in these teacher-directed classrooms was to be the passive taker of information rather than active constructor of knowledge. The children were not really contributing to their learning experiences; instead, they were just being instructed as to what to do and what to learn. Teachers

deploying teacher-directed practices the most did not allow students to express themselves, ask questions, and direct their own learning. The students' initiatives and comments were mostly ignored, and the teachers did not respond to students' emotional needs. The teachers did not ask the students open-ended questions nor promote discussion in the classroom. Peer interactions were also not encouraged or allowed.

The difference between the two Finnish teachers rated as the most teacher-directed ones was that the first teacher used more threats and punitive control with the students than the second teacher. The teacher using punitive control was more inflexible and required all the students to work for long, continuous periods on the tasks and finish them. She was strict with letter shapes and erased students' incorrect answers from their notebooks. She also required students to give an answer even if they said that they did not know. Students had a bit more freedom to move in the lessons of the second teacher who was not as strict and controlling as the first teacher.

The results further demonstrated that the teacher employing the most teacher-directed practices in the Japanese sample used negative expressions to make the students calm down (Table 3). That teacher used punitive control when the students did not follow the rules and sometimes had a negative tone of voice. The teacher ignored most of the students' comments, especially if they were not related to the topic of the lesson. The teacher gave detailed instructions, and students had to follow clearly defined rules for appropriate classroom behavior. The teacher did not support the students in peer interactions and did not let students to solve the problems themselves. All children had to do the same activities, such as copying the same things from the blackboard. The teacher asked closed questions and wanted the students to provide only one correct answer. That was shown, for example, in the way that the teacher was not persistent in addressing an individual who answered incorrectly or did not know how to answer, but instead immediately asked another student to answer until a correct answer was provided.

Discussion

The present study examined how child-centered and teacher-directed teaching practices are evidenced in Grade 1 classrooms in two different cultural and educational contexts, Finland and Japan. The results showed that although teachers received similar numerical scores rated by the ECCOM instrument, their individual way of teaching was reflected in how they interacted with students in authentic classrooms, managed the classroom activities, and delivered the instruction. Thus, teachers' personal interactional styles seemed to play an important role in authentic classroom instruction. The results indicated some similarities and differences in how teaching practices were evidenced in terms of the management, climate, and instruction in authentic classroom situations in two different cultural and educational contexts. In addition, some disparities were also found in the Finnish sample between the teachers receiving similar ECCOM scores. These results highlight the fact that there are different ways to deploy best practices in the classroom.

Child-centered practices in Finnish and Japanese classrooms

The results demonstrated that the teachers employing child-centered practices in both countries promoted students' autonomy, took their initiatives and interests into account, and encouraged their participation in lessons. This aligns with the descriptions of developmentally appropriate practices (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997; Stipek & Byler, 2004) and the propositions of autonomy-supportive teaching described by Reeve and Cheon (2021). Some differences were also found between the countries regarding how child-centered teaching practices were reflected in teachers' pedagogical choices and implementation of instruction. These differences might be due to cultural values and views regarding what are best practices and appropriate behaviors (Lee & Tseng, 2008; Yang & Li, 2018). Following Cheng and Chen (2022), the results might reflect that fact that the concept of child-centered practices was largely constructed in Western culture. Teachers from East-Asian countries

might manifest student-centered instruction somewhat differently in comparison to their Western counterparts (Cheng & Chen, 2022; Li et al., 2020). In the current study, teachers employing child-centered teaching practices in the Finnish Grade 1 classrooms focused more on promoting students' social interaction and socio-emotional skills than their Japanese counterparts. For example, Finnish teachers discussed emotions and emotion regulation skills with their students. This difference might be due to the fact that social and generic learning skills are emphasized in the Finnish curriculum (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2014). The Finnish child-centered teachers also tried to be more approachable to students and showed more physical closeness than their Japanese counterpart. This may be related to the cultural differences in terms of what kind of physical closeness and touching is acceptable in the cultural and educational context. The result also may relate to the individualist culture in Finland, which tends to emphasize individual students' emotional and personalized needs. Finnish culture is described as one of horizontal individualism, focusing on self-concepts that are autonomous from a group (Triandis, 2001). It has been suggested that the culture in which the teacher lives and works influences what kind of instruction represents "best practices" (Cheng & Chen, 2022; Huang et al., 2019; Oyserman & Lee, 2008; Yang & Li, 2018). However, it also should be noted that different teachers have different beliefs concerning best practices, and they have their own personal styles and demeanors, which can be reflected in their classroom interactions. Li et al. (2020) indicated that Chinese kindergarten teachers' pedagogical interactions were related to individual factors, such as age, years of teaching, and level of education.

Another difference between the Japanese child-centered teacher and the two Finnish child-centered teachers was that the Japanese teacher promoted students' leadership and autonomy to a somewhat greater degree. In the Japanese classroom characterized by child-centered practices, students worked mostly in groups, and the groups had the leader of the day who had certain responsibilities. This result may reflect the recent educational trend toward active learning in Japan, where learner-centered approach including group work, debate, and group discussion has been strongly acknowledged in the Course of Study (Kawamura & Musashi, 2016; MEXT, 2012). Another possible explanation for this might be related to Japanese vertical collectivism culture, in which the ability to adjust oneself to the group norm and maintain harmony within the social context are seen as important (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 2001). Moreover, Japanese teachers may encourage students to experience leading the group. Having students engage in groupwork and giving them responsibilities are considered essential practices for developing children's communication and social skills, which will be required in the future in Japanese society.

The children's role in child-centered classrooms in both countries was that of a constructor of knowledge and active contributor to the learning in line with socio-cultural views of learning (see Bransford et al., 2000, for an overview). It can be assumed that through expressing their ideas and responding to their peers, children can enhance their communication and critical thinking skills, which are important throughout their school years and future work life. The Japanese teacher employing child-centered practices, in particular, asked open-ended questions and supported students' problem-solving skills. In a similar vein, the Teaching through Interactions framework has proposed that effective teaching practices foster children's critical thinking and problem-solving skills (Hamre et al., 2013).

Teacher-directed practices in Finnish and Japanese classrooms

Teacher-directed teachers in both countries were the authoritative figures and took charge, led all the activities, and chose the lesson contents. This aligns with the descriptions of teacher-directed practices by Stipek and Byler (2004, 2005). The teachers chose the groupings and settings, and they were the leaders of the lesson. The student's role in these teacher-directed classrooms was to be instructed and to function as a passive taker of information rather than an active constructor of knowledge, as opposed to the socio-cultural views of learning (see Bransford et al., 2000, for an overview). All the children had to do the same exercises despite their varying levels of skill and individual needs. Thus, it

can be concluded that the teachers who deployed the teacher-directed practices in both countries were less sensitive and responsive to students' needs. These results correspond with the assumption that the teacher must be in absolute control and have a teacher-focused authoritarian attitude (Reeve & Cheon, 2021).

Teachers who were rated as employing teacher-directed practices the most in both countries emphasized drill and practice and generally ignored students' initiative and opinions. The Japanese teacher and the Finnish teacher who employed the teacher-directed practices the most also used punitive control when managing the behavior of the students. Punitive control and negative tone of voice are seen as representing low-quality interactions in the classroom according to the Teaching through Interactions framework (Hamre et al., 2013). Teacher-directed practices of Finnish teachers may be explained from the classroom composition or group's needs perspective rather than from horizontal individualistic culture. Although child outcomes and benefits of teaching approaches were not the focus of the current study, teachers scoring high on teacher-directed practices may have prioritized group's needs over individual students' needs and views. For the Japanese teacher, this result may be explained from the viewpoint of the vertical collectivism culture that emphasizes authority. The teacher may see herself as a leader of the class and control it. Since the Course of Study determines the contents of the study and the number of class hours are monitored, the teacher may prioritize reaching the class hours over the interests of students (Reeve & Cheon, 2021; Triandis, 2001). It is also possible that the Japanese teacher might have employed these practices due to the classroom composition or some child characteristics.

General considerations

To sum up, despite some disparities, the teachers in the two countries who were rated as child-centered or teacher-directed resembled each other. It also should be noted that there were some differences between the two teachers rated as being the most child-centered and the two teachers rated as being the most teacher-directed in the Finnish sample. This emphasizes that teachers can deploy teaching practices in different ways and that their personal ways of teaching may be reflected in the way they convey instruction.

In line with propositions of self-determination theory, when children's personal and social as well as their instructional and cognitive needs are carefully attended to, it appears that this can provide an ideally supportive context for learning (Hamre et al., 2013). One important but challenging aspect of beneficial and supportive teaching is the use of differentiated teaching strategies, which ensure that all students have the opportunity to learn with meaningful material that is suited to their individual skill levels. Child-centered (e.g., developmentally appropriate) practices and autonomy-supportive teaching strategies have been for the most part beneficial in terms of student academic and motivational outcomes (Reeve & Cheon, 2021). However, it should be noted that teacher-directed teaching practices also may be beneficial for some students (e.g., Kikas et al., 2014). Existing literature has shown clear advantages of a teacher-directed approach, but the advantages seem to depend on the group composition and characteristics of the children, such as their academic skills and socioeconomic background (Kikas et al., 2014; Stipek et al., 1995). One of the advantages of teacher-directed practices is that they are effective when class sizes are large, as they allow teachers to deliver their instruction as they move through the class. However, to make inferences on the benefits of different approaches, more in-depth investigation including a variety of child outcomes is needed. Accordingly, it should be considered in the future how to support teachers in successfully adapting instruction according to students' individual needs. Furthermore, in their instruction, teachers should be encouraged to use a mixture of teaching practices rather than relying on only one kind of practice (Stipek & Byler, 2004; Tang et al., 2019; Tang, Kikas, et al., 2017).

The present study also has some practical implications for teachers and teacher educators. First, video-recordings of teaching can help pre- and in-service teachers to become aware of their teaching practices and the choices they make during the day. Relatedly, pre- and in-

service teachers would benefit from learning more about social-constructivist orientation, in which a different role for teachers has been defined that emphasizes knowing individual learners and then translating this knowledge into instructional decisions that will guide children toward academic goals. Second, video-recordings and related discussions could help us to make different ways of implementing teaching practices more visible. Our results indicate that although teachers receive similar scores when being rated by ECCOM, teaching practices can be deployed in different ways and teachers can learn from each other how; for example, in-service teachers can observe each other to gain a better grasp of how to develop and use their own child-centered practices. Third, teacher professional development should also account for cultural norms and values and encourage wider discussions on how they are reflected in our understanding of child-centered versus teacher-directed practices in different educational systems. Following Huang et al. (2019), teachers' pedagogical interactions are influenced by the surrounding social context, including cultural expectations and contextual demands, as well as history, including previous experiences, education, and knowledge. The current study was among the first attempts to apply the ECCOM observation instrument in Japanese classrooms. Future studies should investigate teaching practices with a larger and more representative sample, and also test the reliability and validity of the ECCOM instrument in Japanese context. In addition, further studies should account for the influence of age and grade level, as Cheng and Chen (2022) indicated that grade significantly moderated the associations between student-centered instruction and students' learning behaviors.

Conclusions

Warm and responsive classroom interactions are essential for successful learning in school. Therefore, it is important to investigate the ways in which teachers implement effective teaching practices in authentic classroom situations. The current study contributes to the extant literature by employing a case study approach and providing evidence on how teaching practices are conducted in authentic classrooms in two different countries. Despite similarities between the teachers from each country, cultural values may play a role in how the teachers create a positive climate, implement instruction, and organize activities in authentic classrooms. Thus, scholars, educators, and policymakers should be aware of cultural influences in curricular and pedagogical approaches and better account for these cross-cultural distinctions when developing teacher training programs in East-Asian countries (Cheng & Chen, 2022; Yang & Li, 2018). Future studies should include other cultural and educational contexts to investigate how child-centered and teacher-directed practices are evidenced in actual classroom situations in different countries. In addition, teaching practices should be complemented with teacher questionnaires and child outcomes to gain a more in-depth understanding of the prerequisites and developmental outcomes of different teaching practices.

Disclosure statement

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