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Policy Implementation Studies:
The Case of Eliminating Day-care Waiting Lists in Japan

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Abstract

This paper examines the implementation of policies designed to eliminate day-care centre waiting lists in Japan over the past two decades. It first outlines the background of day-care centre problem and reviews policy implementation theories. The study aims to examine how Japan's childcare policies have been implemented with what means, by what actors, and with what obstacles remaining, and to obtain implications for the implementation of future policy strategies. On the basis of a literature review, two major theoretical approaches, top-down and bottom-up, are employed as analytical frameworks. The study finds that in the administration of day-care services in Japan, although the central government provides the institutional framework through neo-liberal reform, local governments play an important role due to decentralization. Therefore, the bottom-up approach seems dominant in Japanese day-care reform. This finding suggests that it is crucial for local governments to cultivate their implementation capacity and to pay heed to citizen needs and opinions in the policy process. Finally, the paper calls for further research to deal with the complexity and multiplicity of this problem and to have more concrete suggestions for the implementation of future day-care policies.

Acronyms

JNCSW/NCC	Japan National Council of Social Welfare and National Council of Childcare
LDP	Liberal Democratic Party
MHLW	Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare
MIC	Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications
NCOLC/RIC	National Childcare Organization Liaison Committee and Research Institute for Childcare
NDL	National Diet Library
NIPSSR	National Institute of Population and Social Security Research
PFI	Private Finance Initiative (PFI)

Contents

Abstract.....	2
Acronyms	3
Contents.....	4
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	5
1.1 Background.....	5
1.2 Research Aims and Objectives	9
1.3 Structure of the study	10
Chapter 2: Literature Review	11
2.1 Implementation Studies and Theories	11
2.1.1 History of implementation studies.....	11
2.1.2 Top-down approach.....	12
2.1.3 Bottom-up approach	16
2.1.4 Synthesis	19
2.5 Definition and Analytical Perspective	22
2.6 Methodology.....	24
Chapter 3: Case Study.....	26
3.1 Background of the Case.....	26
3.1.1 The definition and types of Japanese day-care centres	26
3.1.2 Pre-primary school children and their care.....	27
3.1.3 The Japanese Child Welfare Law	28
3.1.4 The problem of children on waiting lists	30
3.1.5. Overview of past policy implementation.....	33
3.2 Macro-implementation.....	34
3.2.1 Strategies for increasing day-care centres' capacity	35
3.2.2 Privatisation	37
3.2.3 Summary	39
3.3 Micro-implementation.....	40
3.3.1 Privatisation	40
3.3.2 Deregulation initiatives	41
3.3.3. Problems.....	42
3.3.4 Summary	47
3.4 Case Study Analysis and Implications	48
Chapter 4: Conclusion.....	52
Bibliography	56

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background

Currently, the children's day-care system in Japan is witnessing a period of significant transition. The provision of adequate childcare has been a chief priority—especially since the late 1990s, during which time the Japanese government started to tackle the problem of declining fertility. Japan has faced a seriously declined birth rate in recent decades. Since the second baby boom in the mid-1970s, the total fertility rate (TFR) of Japanese women has been consistently declining. As of 2012, Japan's TFR is 1.41, which is extremely low by international standards: ranking the nation 179th among 194 of the WHO member states (WHO, 2013). The number of births has dropped off by almost half over the last 50 or so years, from 2.09 million in 1973 to 1.07 million in 2010. The population of children under the age of 15 years was 27 million in the early 1980s, but fell to 16.84 million as of 2010. Now they account for only 13.1% of the total population (NIPSSR, 2012). The comparatively fewer number of children and extremely low TFR in Japan has produced a rapid ageing of the population structure. What with the consistent decrease in the working age population and sharp increase in the dependency ratio, such demographic changes threaten many serious problems in the near future, including economic depression, a crisis of the public pension system, and labour shortages. Therefore, addressing the issue of the declining birth rate is an urgent task for the Japanese government. As one of the response measures, the government has set about ensuring the

compatibility between childrearing and active female participation in the labour force as a primary political goal.

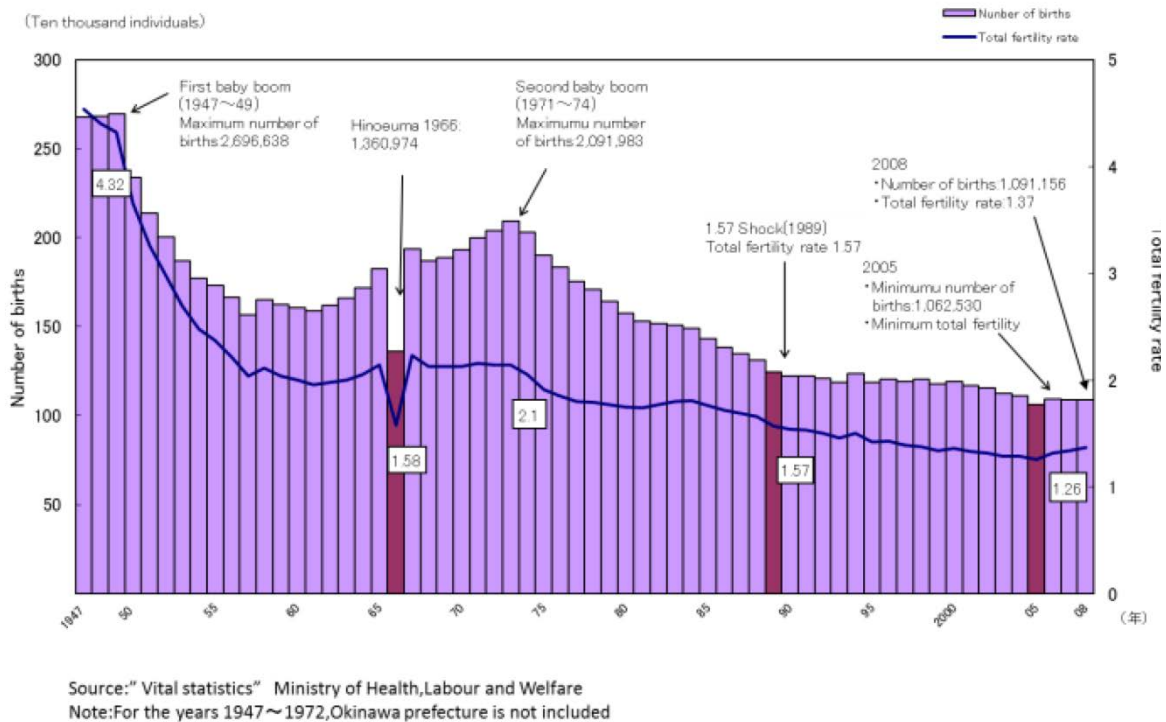


Figure 1: Annual transition in the number of births and total fertility.
Source: MHLW (2010).

During the period of high economic growth in Japan during the 1960s and 1970s, the general family model was established according to which men would work as primary breadwinners, while women would reside in the home after marriage as housewives and be chiefly responsible for raising and caring for children. However, due to the increase in the Japanese female labour force participation rate and accompanying decreases in female labour force exit rates owing to childbirth—along with the expansion of the system for childcare leave (basically one year) and the promotion of a more

gender-equal society—the demand for day-care, especially for younger children, has increased dramatically (Izumi, 2005). The current day-care facilities have been unable to cope with the significant increase in demand, and as a result, many children are waitlisted and cannot enrol, despite having submitted applications. As of 2012, there were 24,825 children on waiting lists across the country. In addition, more than 850,000 of potentially waitlisted children are estimated to exit the application process (Nobe, 2010). 12.7% of the parents who report that they do not have their desired number of children point to this day-care shortage among the reasons why they do not (NIPSSR, 2010).

Statistics show that the majority of married couples' desired number of children is usually larger than the actual number (NIPSSR, 2001). Nevertheless, the concern that loss of income and childrearing costs will strain family budgets inclines couples to have fewer children. Moreover, women have faced an either-or choice between work and childrearing due to the fact that an adequate social support system has not yet been established—even though women's full participation in society has become much more active (Okazawa and Obuchi, 2010). According to an ongoing investigation by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW) (2011), during 2005–2009, 62% of mothers who previously had a job were out of work for a half a year after childbirth. This shows the difficulty of coping with both work and childrearing.

Accordingly, the creation of day-care centres is an essential project in Japan: both to prevent the declining birth rate and to ensure female labour force participation in order to secure long-term economic development. It is the shared responsibility of central and local governments to manage this problem, for the Child Welfare Law stipulates that all children have the right to day-care services. Acknowledging this pressing issue and its responsibility, the Japanese government has repeatedly tried to implement effective measures to ensure the provision of childcare for over two decades. Yet, children on waiting lists never seem to disappear. Hence, although the government has recently designed a new project for the expansion of day-care centre services in the country, its effectiveness remains questionable due to the persistence of the previous trends.

In light of this context, this paper focuses on how past policies related to day-care centres have been implemented and examines what factors have made the elimination of children on waiting lists difficult. A central explanation may be attributed to the nature of the policy-making process itself at the level of the central government. Some former Japanese bureaucrats have pointed out that their ex-colleagues: (1) have difficulties in understanding the current situation and performing rigorous fact-finding, analysis and evaluation; (2) are good at rationally describing an ideal outcome, but do not necessarily know how to use available resources to actually realise this outcome; (3) are largely indifferent to or ignorant about the realities of the policy implementation process (Shimada, 2010a). Besides

central officials, blame may also reside with local administrators—who are able to practically determine the total amount of social and administrative services received by citizens—but who may lack the appropriate implementation capabilities and motivation. The examination of the implementation processes surrounding day-care policies in Japan crucially furnishes knowledge about whether or not administrative activities and public services are supplied in an appropriate manner. Without precise analysis and characterisation of the real situation, it may also not be possible to evaluate policies' effectiveness.

1.2 Research Aims and Objectives

This paper analyses Japan's set of policies relating to the provision of childcare over past 20 years, given the context that, despite the strong commitment of the Japanese government to eliminate day-care waiting lists, there are still many children who need day-care services but do not have places at available centres. Policy implementation may appear to be a process according to which a formulated policy is automatically implemented. In fact, however, it is a very complex process closely connected to the issues of official discretion and limited administrative resources (Hayakawa et al., 2004). Therefore, after carefully surveying the existing literature on policy implementation theories, this paper aims to unravel how policies designed to eliminate day-care waiting lists have been implemented: with what means, by what actors, to what degree of success, and with what outstanding obstacles remaining. The objectives are to examine policy implementation

theory, to explain how the implementation of certain childcare policies in Japan has been conducted and has evolved, and to posit implications for the implementation of future policy strategies and their realisation.

1.3 Structure of the study

The following chapters of this paper are set out as follows. In the second chapter, this paper summarise the different strains within the existing literature on implementation theory. Two main approaches are identified: the top-down and bottom-up models. After the paper has examined the strengths and weaknesses of both approaches independently, the paper considers a combination of both approaches. On the basis of the theoretical debate, then, the term ‘implementation’ is defined for the purposes of this Japanese case study, and the paper describes the methods used to conduct this research. The case study, presented in the third chapter, analyses the respective implementation processes associated with policies designed to reduce the numbers of children on day-care waiting lists in Japan. Here, the theories of both top-down and bottom-up views are employed as analytical frameworks. This chapter is divided into four sections, which present the background to the issue, macro-implementation processes, micro-implementation processes, and implications for the future implementation of new measures. In the final chapter, the paper summarizes the contents of the research, addresses its limitations, and suggests possible directions for further inquiry.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This review focuses on the theory of policy implementation. First, it carefully describes the emergence and development of implementation studies. Next, the paper examines scholars' various theoretical ideas and conceptual frameworks of policy implementation, mainly focusing on two major approaches: the top-down and bottom-up models. As both models have comparative advantages, a contingency analysis and the strengths of mixed strategies composed of both approaches are paid attention. The purpose of this review is twofold: first, to provide the focus and the theoretical underpinning for review of the particular case study taken up in the next chapter; and second, to set the definition of 'implementation' to delineate the scope of the research.

2.1 Implementation Studies and Theories

2.1.1 History of implementation studies

It could be argued that, until the end of the 1960s, there was a general optimism that reigned, and practitioners seemed to take it for granted that the actualisation of a given policy, the realisation of a political goal, or the enforcement of a law would proceed in a smooth and straightforward manner (Hill and Hupe, 2009). Needless to say, policy implementation had been a relatively neglected area of the study of the policy process, representing a 'missing link' (Hargrove, 1975) between the policy making and the evaluation of policy outcomes. However, research on policy implementation has veritably exploded since the publication of Pressman and Wildavsky's

influential case study *Implementation* in 1973. The authors examined the factors underlying the failure of the federal economic development programme in the city of Oakland, California, despite the fact that the programme was backed by political agreement and adequate financial resources and was widely expected to succeed. Most of the early American studies on policy implementation focused on the ‘implementation failure’ or ‘implementation gap’, and their authors took very pessimistic views about the ability of government to effectively implement its programmes (Lester et al., 1987). A great number of studies have since accumulated, and various theoretical frameworks have been offered. Two major approaches guiding implementation studies have emerged—the top-down and bottom-up approaches.

2.1.2 Top-down approach

The top-down models present in the literature are policy-centred, and they view the political system from the perspective of policy makers on the assumption that hierarchical control and compliance with authoritative decisions are the best courses of action for successful policy implementation. Therefore, the research task for scholars adhering to this school is to identify obstacles, such as inadequate resources and a lack of political acceptability, limiting ‘perfect implementation’ (Hood, 1976). In this approach, policy formulation and implementation are clearly distinguished. The ‘top-downers’ start their analysis from authoritative decision, which usually takes the form of statutorily-enacted policy, but may also be relayed by important executive

orders or court decisions (Mazmanian and Sabatier, 1983). They then try to explain how decisions at the ‘top’ are transmitted down the hierarchy and translated into more specific rules or procedures at lower levels of the chain of command (Barrett and Fudge, 1981), and they examine any resultant gaps between initial intentions and actual outcomes (Shimada, 2010b). This view suggests that the centrally located actors are the most relevant to producing the desired policy effects (Matland, 1995). To explain variation in implementation success and failure across policies and programmes, specific variables and conceptual frameworks have been developed. Those variables vary according to each framework and scholar.

Van Meter and Van Horn can be considered as the first contributors in the field to have put forward a theoretical framework for implementation studies. The authors defined policy implementation comprehensively, as it ‘encompasses those actions by public and private individuals (or groups) that are directed at the achievement of objectives set forth in prior policy decisions’ (Van Meter and Van Horn 1975: 447), and conceive of the end point of implementation as ‘the degree to which anticipated services are actually delivered’ (ibid, 1975: 449). Van Meter and Van Horn, guided by three areas of study—organisation theory, studies of the impact of public policy, and studies of inter-governmental relations—devised their model to include six independent variables. They are ‘standards and objectives’; ‘resources’; ‘inter-organisational communication and enforcement activities’; ‘characteristics of the implementing agencies’; ‘economic, social, and political

conditions'; and 'the disposition of implementers'. As Figure 2 illustrates, this implementation process model specifies the relationship between policy and performance, as well as the relationship among the variables (Sotokawa, 2001).

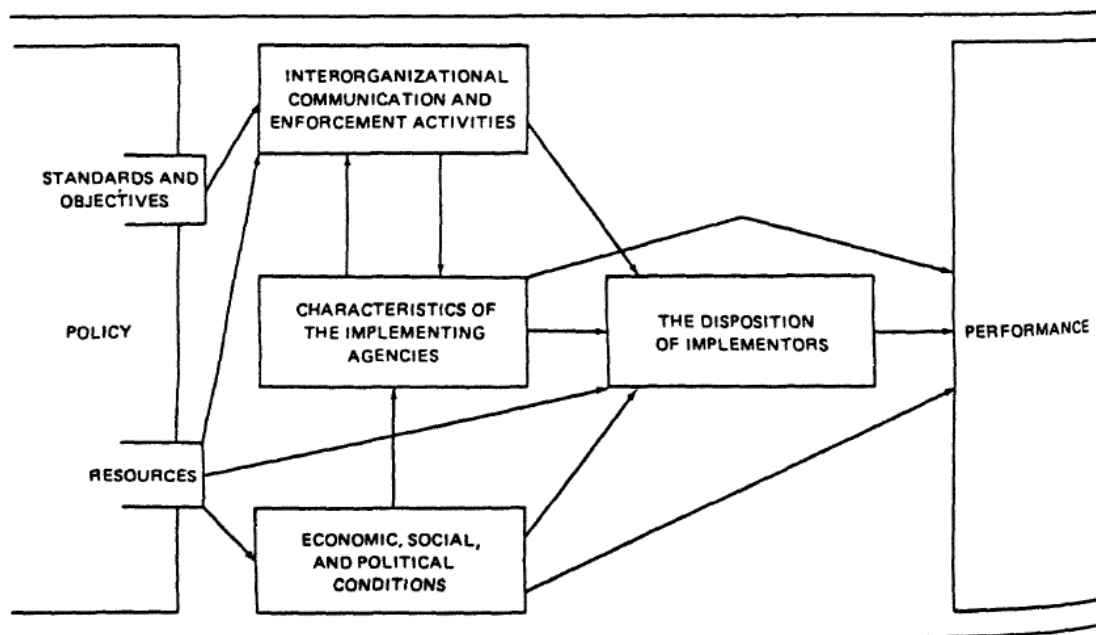


Figure 2: A model of the policy implementation process.

Source: Van Meter and Van Horn (1975).

However, this model was criticised for being an 'abstract systems model' that is not easily operationalised and for not identifying which variables are controlled by various actors (Sabatier and Mazmanian, 1980). The work of Sabatier and Mazmanian (1980) served to further develop the top-down model. The authors presented 17 variables within three categories (tractability of the problem, ability of statute to structure implementation, and non-statutory variables affecting implementation) that they argued

affect the probability of successful implementation. The salient feature of this model is that the authors focused on 'legal and political mechanisms for affecting the preferences and/or constraining the behaviour of street-level bureaucrats' (Sabatier, 1986: 25). Sabatier and Mazmanian held that it is possible to keep the behaviour of street-level bureaucrats within acceptable bounds over time if the conditions are met.

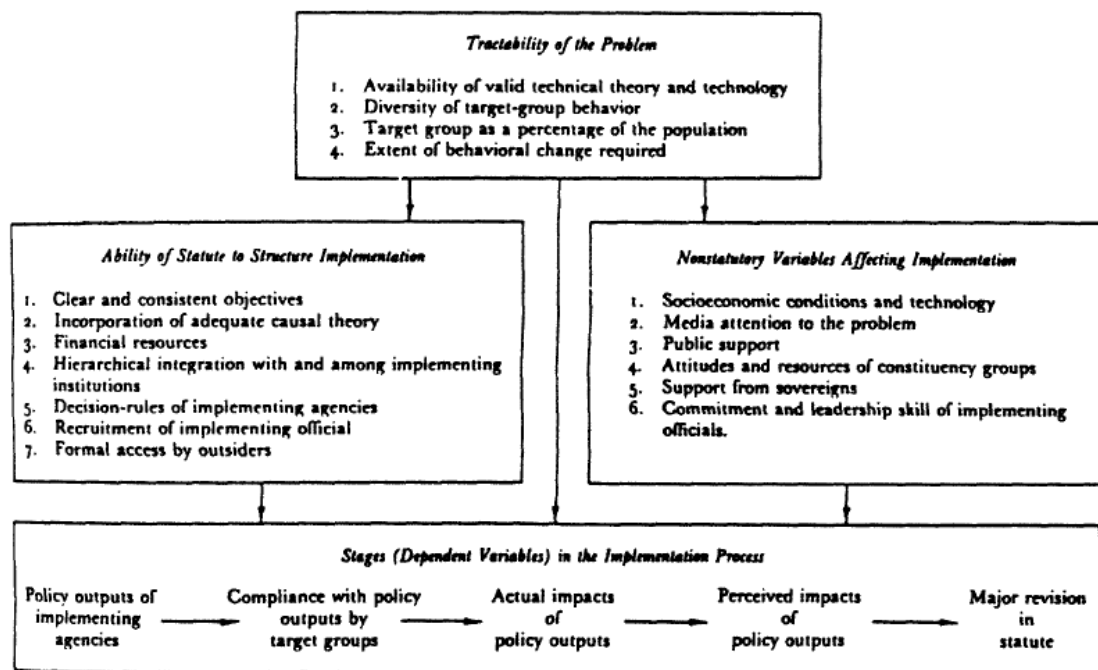


Figure 3: Skeletal flow diagram of the variables involved in the implementation process.

Source: Sabatier and Mazmanian (1980).

Broadly speaking, top-downers' purpose is to develop generalisable policy advice for policy makers. Common top-down advice includes the following prescriptions: (1) make policy goals clear and consistent; (2) minimise the

number of policy actors; (3) limit the extent of change necessary; and (4) place implementation responsibility with an agency sympathetic to the policy's goals (Matland, 1995).

Since its inception, the top-down approach has attracted many different criticisms. For example, the models containing variables ranging from 4 (Edwards, 1980) to 17 (Sabatier and Mazmanian, 1980) in number are lacking of parsimony (Lester et al., 1987) and failing to identify the 'critical variables' (Goggin, et al., 1987) affecting policy implementation. In addition, top-downers have been challenged for assuming 'that the framers of the policy decision (e.g. statute) are the key actors and that others are basically impediments. This, in turn, leads them to neglect strategic initiatives coming from the private sector, from street-level bureaucrats or local implementing officials, and from other policy subsystems' (Sabatier, 1986: 30).

2.1.3 Bottom-up approach

An alternative model—the so-called 'bottom-up' approach—has been developed as a more realistic understanding of policy implementation. In contrast to the top-down approach, the bottom-up approach starts 'by identifying the network of actors involved in service delivery in ...local areas', and then tries to 'identify the local, regional, and national actors involved in the planning, financing, and execution of the relevant governmental and nongovernmental programmes' (Lester et al., 1987: 204). In the process, 'the familiar policy stages of formulation, implementation, and reformulation

tended to disappear...studies have shown that local actors often deflect centrally-mandated programmes toward their own ends' (Sabatier, 1986: 22). Just as the top-down school has inspired various models, 'bottom-uppers' also have developed many types of theories with bottom-up perspective.

Lipsky is a key figure for the development of the bottom-up perspective. He has stated that actors at the top of the policy making hierarchy provide the context in which street-level bureaucrats exert discretion. Namely, street-level actors are restrained by rules, regulations, and directives from above. However, they are not merely situated at the end of the policy chain, but rather are primary actors themselves. Lipsky (1980: xii) argued that 'the decisions of street-level bureaucrats, the routines they establish, and the devices they invent to cope with uncertainties and work pressures, effectively *become* the policies they carry out' and that policy is thus fundamentally formulated on the ground.

According to Berman (1978), another bottom-upper, policy implementation occurs on two levels. At the macro-implementation level, centrally located actors devise a government programme. This process involves many levels of actors and organisations. Since each administrative agency has a certain autonomy and has a chance to influence the making of a government programme, the main concern of macro-implementation is how to translate an ambiguous policy decision into a concrete government programme. At the micro-implementation level, local organisations, which react to the

macro-level plans, develop their own programmes, and carry out them. In this process, central policy makers can only have an indirect influence over micro-level activity; therefore, the results may not develop in anticipated or desirable ways. This is what Berman referred to as the 'micro-implementation problem'.

Barrett and Fudge (1981) have strongly commended Hjern's 'implementation structure' approach, challenging the formal organisational structure focus and hierarchical perspectives adopted in implementation studies. Barrett and Fudge held that implementation is not 'putting policy into effect', but 'getting something done', where performance rather than conformance is the main objective. Their emphasis is placed on the interaction between policy makers and implementers in the sense that implementers are not passive agents, but 'semi-autonomous groups that are actively pursuing their own goals' (ibid: 258). In their view, 'policy cannot be seen as a "fix," but more as a series of intentions around which bargaining takes place and which may be modified' (ibid: 25). Because of this notion, they have found it inappropriate to distinguish between policy formulation and implementation, and thus elect to consider implementation as a 'policy/action continuum'.

In contrast to top-downers' desire to offer prescriptive advice, bottom-uppers have placed more emphasis on describing what factors have caused difficulties in reaching stated goals (Matland, 1995). Yet, the bottom-up approach is not free from criticism, either. The first criticism is that

bottom-uppers are often in danger of overemphasising the degree of local discretion and underestimating the direct or indirect influence exercised by central authorities. Bottom-uppers seem to discount the fact that institutional settings, the available resources, and the access to an implementing arena may be centrally and statutorily determined (ibid). Moreover, it is claimed that, due to the bottom-up approach's undue attention to street-level actors, the analysis of factors which affect their perception and behaviours tends to be neglected (Mayama, 1991). Sabatier (1986) also criticised bottom-uppers' views as to the definition of implementation, which tend to eliminate the distinction between policy formulation and implementation. Sabatier alleged that such elimination poses a number of potential costs, first among which is that 'it makes it very difficult to distinguish the relative influence of elected officials and civil servants—thus precluding an analysis of democratic accountability and bureaucratic discretion, hardly trivial topics' (ibid: 31). Furthermore, the view of the policy process as a continuum without decision points excludes policy evaluation because there is no policy to evaluate and the analysis of policy change (ibid).

2.1.4 Synthesis

Top-downers and bottom-uppers frame policy implementation problems differently and offer apparently contrary prescriptions for solutions, given that they choose to study different type of policies and policy situations. Top-downers tend to choose relatively clear policies, while bottom-uppers

often study policies with greater degrees of uncertainty and ambiguity embedded within them. Recognising the strengths and weaknesses of the two approaches, the need became apparent to identify what kinds of factors are more crucial under what conditions and to combine the two perspectives. In criticising the tendency of implementation studies to present a large number of variables that may affect implementation, Matland (1995) offered a synthesised model with a limited set of variables. He used the level of 'ambiguity' and the intensity of 'conflict' to typify four different policy issues, and he presented an appropriate approach according to each case. Like this contingency model was initially developed by Berman (1980).

Berman (1980) differentiated between two different implementation strategy designs: 'programmed implementation' and 'adaptive implementation'. The two implementation approaches basically correspond to the 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' approaches, respectively. Berman called for the necessity of contingency analysis because '[t]here is no universally best way to implement policy. Either programmed or adaptive implementation can be effective if applied to the appropriate situation, but a mismatch between approach and situation aggravates the very implementation problems these approaches seek to overcome' (Berman, 1980: 206). However, he also suggests a mixed strategy composed of both approaches in the case of some policy processes that play to the main elements of both approaches.

The 'programmed' approach sees implementation problems arising from the

following factors: (1) ambiguity in policy goals resulting in or caused by misunderstanding, confusion, or value conflict; (2) the participation of too many actors with overlapping authority; and (3) implementers' resistance, ineffectualness, or inefficiency. It is considered that programme implementers can avoid those problems by producing a well-specified plan in order to make the programme almost automatically executed. The 'adaptive' approach diagnoses implementation problems as arising from: (1) the overspecification and rigidity of goals; and (2) the failure to engage relevant actors in decision making, and the excessive control of policy deliverers. The prescription for those problems is general or vague goals, the active participation of relevant actors, high-level discretion among service deliverers, and improvement through evaluation.

Berman argued that policy makers could use either approach, but that their choice should depend on a set of situational parameters describing the policy context. The parameters include the following: the scope of change; the degree of certainty in the technology or theory; the degree of conflict over policy's goals and means; the structure of the institutional setting; and the stability of the policy environment. Berman suggested that when change is incremental, technology is certain, conflict is low, the institutional setting is tightly coupled, and the environment is stable, a programmed approach would be a desirable strategy to cope with anticipated implementation problems. This particular type of synthesis model is compelling in the sense that it identifies the importance of choosing an appropriate approach based

on the specific context.

2.5 Definition and Analytical Perspective

Before the paper proceed to the case study, it is needed to precisely define ‘implementation’ in order to identify the scope of analysis pursued in the next section. On the assumption of the policy cycle model, which identifies several stages—agenda-setting, policy formulation, decision making, implementation, and evaluation—implementation is simply taken to mean the stage between when decision-making stops and evaluation starts. The top-down approach tends to adopt this perspective by assuming that policy makers formulate policy, and then other bureaucrats implement it (John, 2012). The absence of this distinction may make policy evaluation and policy change analysis more difficult. However, this understanding raises a question with regard to the starting point of the implementation process. In the policy cycle model, the process of implementation can be narrower or wider depending on what is considered as policy and on the individual perception and situation. For example, if a decision of parliament and certain law are taken as policies, everything that follows is implementation, while administrative procedures may appear to be policy for officials in local administrations (Barrett and Fudge, 1981). Pressman and Wildavsky (1984) excluded from the definition of implementation the governmental action of converting political intentions into programmes, and they regarded implementation as beginning when political intentions are operationalised. On the other hand, others, for example Williams (1971), included ‘efforts to

convert decisions into operational terms', thereby referring to implementation more loosely as any 'decision' or 'objective' (Barrett and Fudge, 1981).

Bottom-uppers, by contrast, do not agree with the separation between policy formation and policy implementation. They argue that implementation may be best understood in terms of a 'policy-action continuum' involving successive periods of refinement and the translation of policy into specific procedures. This is because policy statements or statutes are often so vague, general, and poorly related to policy actions. The view of the implementation process as one of evolution (Majone and Wildavsky, 1979) and mutual adaptation (Browne and Wildavsky, 1983) may provide a more realistic understanding. Ingram (1990) claimed that 'implementation scholars should select their starting point with a view to serving the ultimate goal of improving policy' and '[a] concept of implementation that separates policy formulation from implementation cannot help policy'. Palumbo et al. (1984: 47-48) pointed out that many researchers fail to distinguish between the distinct concepts of policies, statutes, and programmes. The authors contended that a policy refers to the intentions or principles that guide specific actions, such as a statute or programme, therefore, what is implemented is not policy, but a multiplicity of statutes and programmes aimed at achieving a particular policy. On this basis, policy goals can be successfully achieved even when specific statutory objectives are not met.

In light of the above arguments, this paper defines policy implementation as the entire process associated with realising the policy objectives. The paper sees the elimination of day-care centre waiting lists in Japan as the governmental (policy) objective, and all following procedures are considered the implementation process, including the formulation of laws, regulations, and programmes. There is an advantage to folding the formation of laws, regulations, and programmes into the understanding of policy implementation because implementation failures are sometimes caused by the implementing activity, whereas it might be attributed the programme itself which made with wrong causation or theory in the first place (Shimada, 2010a).

2.6 Methodology

The methodology for conducting the case study in the next section relies on primary and secondary source research. The documents examined include Japanese government documents, white papers, academic journals and articles, books and Internet-based resources. Already the paper has described theories of policy implementation in the preceding section. This review of the existing literature gives an understanding of policy implementation and provides the focus for the case study as well as available approaches: top-down, bottom-up, and the combination or ‘synthesis’ of the former two. Here the paper employs both top-down and bottom-up perspectives, acknowledges the advantages and disadvantages of each, and determines which approach has utility or is appropriate for the particular

case taken up in this research. The aim this particular case study is to analyse the implementation process and the degree of policy success related to the Japanese day-care system and of its waiting list problem. Further, the paper hopes to identify the factors that affect the achievement of the stated policy objective. The paper considers the period from 1994 (the year the first day-care-related policy was implemented in Japan) up to the present day. All of this period is selected for analysis because longitudinal study is important in order to observe the policy learning process and its evolution (Sabatier, 1986). Further, as the paper has defined implementation broadly above, the entire process of realising the policy objectives is the scope of analysis.

While such a wide lens for this implementation analysis enables us to investigate various phenomena, it likewise makes it difficult to achieve detailed focus. In order to overcome this problem, the case study will be divided into two parts. First, the paper discusses the macro-implementation level, in which the formulation of specific statutes or programmes has taken place. Then, micro-implementation—the stage of implementing programmes on the ground—will be examined. Informed by the various abovementioned theoretical knowledge in the literature, this paper tries to answer the following questions: (1) What kinds of strategies have been used and will be used to address the problem of day-care waiting lists in Japan?; (2) Who are the main policy actors involved?; (3) To what extent have target policies been effective up until now?; (4) What problems hinder the achievement of the policy objective?; (5) What are the possible solutions or strategies to

circumvent these obstacles?

Chapter 3: Case Study

This case study analyses the implementation of Japanese policies designed to eliminate the problem of day-care waiting lists over the past 20 years. Before analysing and looking at what has happened during this particular policy implementation process, the paper briefly contextualise the issue by describing the types of Japanese day-care centres, the main provisions of the legislation related to childcare services in the country, and the nature of the waiting list issue and proposed means of combating it.

3.1 Background of the Case

3.1.1 The definition and types of Japanese day-care centres

The day-care centre is one of the principal ‘child welfare facilities’ identified by the Child Welfare Law. These centres are intended to provide daytime childcare to infants, toddlers, and young children (up until primary-school age) at the entrustment of their parents or guardians (Article 39).

Day-care centres in Japan can be classified into two types: licensed and non-licensed facilities. Licensed day-care centres fulfil minimum the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW) standards relating to facility specifications, care times and durations, and contents of activities provided, etc., and they receive a government subsidy. Licensed day-care centres, regardless of whether they are operated by public or private

organisations, are subject to municipality regulations, and local welfare offices decide on which applicants are admitted according to their review processes (Izumi, 2005). Fee structures and admission criteria are uniform within each municipality. The fee is determined by the user's income and the child's age, and the average cost of full-time licensed day-care services totals around 20,000–30,000 yen (£ 133–200) (Tokyo University). In contrast, 'non-licensed' is the generic term for day-care facilities that provide daytime childcare, but that do not meet minimum standards. There are various types of non-licensed day-care centres, such as those operated by private organisations or individuals with small or no government subsidies, including in-house day-care centres and baby hotels. Non-licensed day-care centres are generally assumed to be less desirable compared to licenced centres in terms of facility quality and cost; the fees for non-licensed day-care services ranges between approximately 100,000–150,000 yen (£ 666–1000) per child (ibid). The lack of subsidies for non-licensed day-care centres is directly responsible for their higher price.

3.1.2 Pre-primary school children and their care

Looking at Japanese preschool children in 2011, 32.7% (2.08 million) of them were enrolled licensed day-care centres, 2.8% (180,000) were in non-licensed day-care centres, and others were looked after either at kindergarten or at home. The percentages of young children in childcare facilities in 2011 had increased from those in 2003—27.4% (licensed) and 2.5% (non-licensed). Among the preschool population in day-care, the increased numbers of

children in the 0–2 year age range is particularly prominent (National Childcare Organization Liaison Committee/Research Institute for Childcare (NCOLC/RIC), 2012). This tendency is expected to continue—even in the face of severe day-care centre shortages—along with the increasing number of mothers who prefer to work.

3.1.3 The Japanese Child Welfare Law

The administration of day-care services in Japan is chiefly governed by the Child Welfare Law. The system of Japanese day-care is designed to have three main components in accordance with the principle that ‘all children shall equally be afforded the guaranteed level of life’ (Article 1 (2)). As the first of the three, each municipality has the responsibility to ensure the provision of day-care services and to manage admissions. Per the Child Welfare Law, Article 24, it is clearly noted that in the cases where a guardian’s work, illness or any other reasons, the municipal government shall, when the guardian applies, provide day-care to children lacking daycare in a nursery center. This provision can be understood to mean that all children lacking day-care have the right to receive day-care services, and it is the municipal government that must provide them adequate day-care according to their parents’ application and in deference to their preferences. The municipal governments also have the duty to provide alternative forms of aid when no nearby or available day-care centres are present. Moreover, Article 56: 8 (2) obliges the select municipalities where there are many children on waiting lists to develop their own ‘day-care plans’. The second

feature of the Japanese day-care system is that the law sets minimum standards for each facility's condition and management. Since the institution of day-care is a national public service based on the Child Welfare Law, the quality and condition of day-care centres must be equally ensured across the country. Until recently, minimum standards were uniformly laid out by the Minister of the MHLW. Since the establishment of the decentralisation laws in 2011, however, standards are to be stipulated in Prefectural and City Ordinances. In so doing, prefectural and city governments are required to adhere to 'facility management criteria' established by the MHLW. These 'facility management criteria' consist of two types: 'guiding criteria' and 'criteria to consider' (Article 45 (2)). As an exemption, prefectural and local governments are allowed to relax 'guiding criteria' to 'standards' in areas in which there are high numbers of children on day-care waiting lists. Third feature of the Japanese system pertains to the cost needed to achieve minimum standards. To ensure that day-care centres are operating above required standards, day-care centres need financial safeguards. Therefore, municipalities are obliged to bear the cost of public and private licensed day-care centres, and prefectural and national governments are to provide financial assistance for municipalities according to certain criteria (NCOLC/RIC, 2012). Overall, although the administration of day-care centres falls under the jurisdiction of the MHLW, the Japanese day-care system is chiefly the responsibility of municipal governments, and it is municipalities' primary obligation to manage admissions, ensure minimum standards are met, and provide required financial support. The duties of

establishing minimum day-care service standards to and continually improving them fall to national and prefectural governments.

3.1.4 The problem of children on waiting lists

In Japan, despite the declining birth rate, the number of children whose parents want to enrol their children in day-care centres has been increasing as a result of the growing share of two-earner households. Due to day-care centres' general inability to catch up to the elevated demand, large numbers of children are placed on waiting lists and cannot receive immediate care. The waitlisted are defined as those who have applied and met the admission requirements of a licensed day-care centre, but who have not been admitted. The MHLW changed this definition in April 2001. The new definition excludes those who are waiting for their first choice licensed day-care centre if they can be admitted to a local government's licensed day-care centre or some more inconvenient centre available to them (NIPSSR, 2003). As a result, the number of waitlisted children in official statistics declined by 14,000 and become 21,201 in 2001 (NCOLC/RIC, 2012). The number of children on waiting lists has maintained at a high level since the late 1990s. As a result of measures aiming to eliminate such waiting lists, the government succeeded in increasing day-care centres' quotas by several tens of thousands each year. Yet, the diminishing numbers of waitlisted children—a trend which ran from a peak in 2003 through the year 2007—have displayed an increasing tendency again since 2008 (ibid).

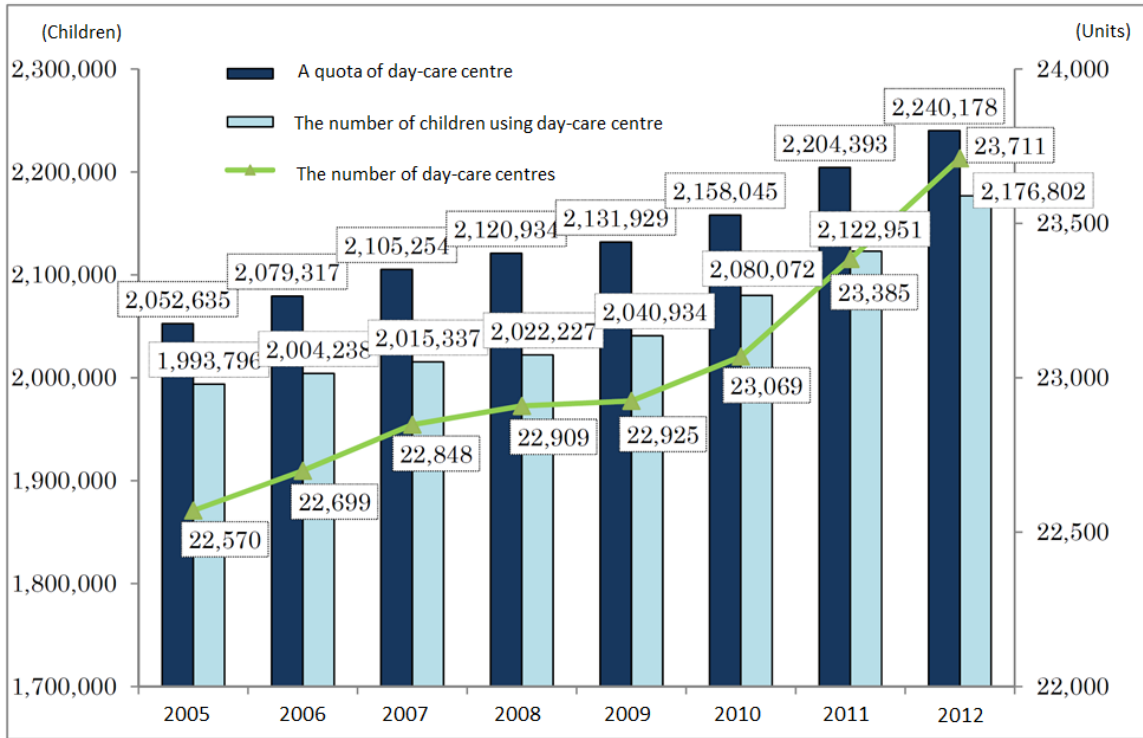


Figure 4: The transition in the number of day-care centre quota, children using day-care centre and day-care centres.

Source: MHLW (2012).

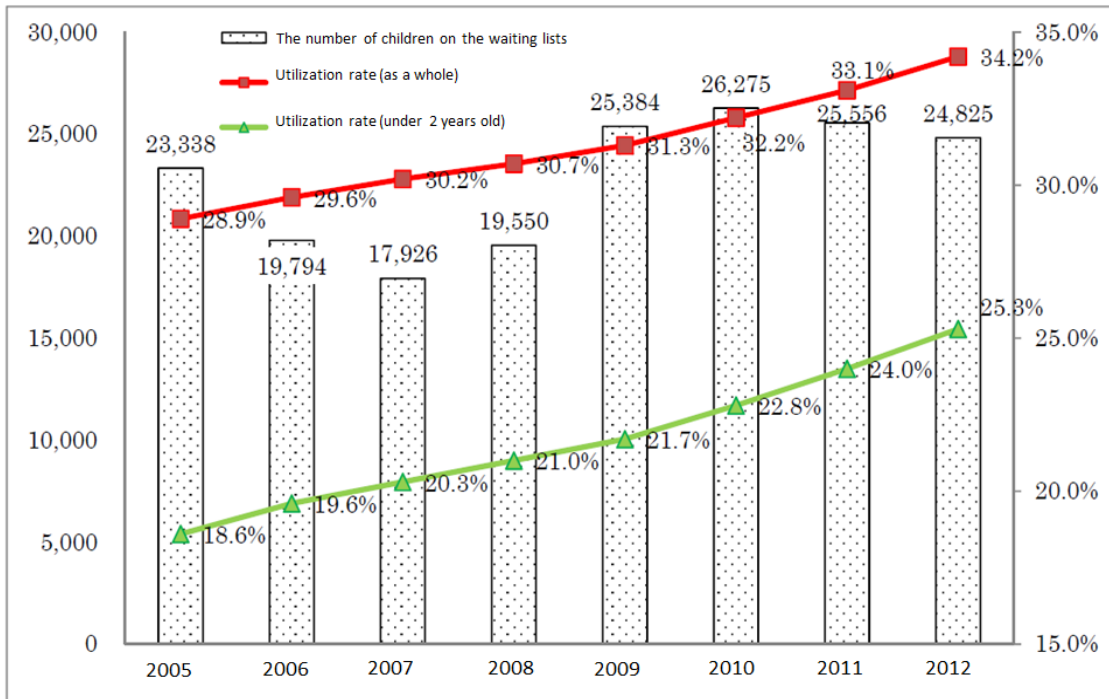


Figure 5: The transition in the number of waitlisted children and utilisation rate of day-car centre.

Source: MHLW (2012).

As of April 2012, according to MHLW, there are 24,825 waitlisted children across the country. One of the chief difficulties in solving the waiting list problem lies in the huge pool of potential waiting list candidates; an increase in the supply of day-care facilities stimulates this potential demand, but does not satisfy it. It is estimated that there are 850,000 children who could be on waiting lists, but are not presently (Nobe, 2010). In terms of demographics, the characteristics of the waiting list problem are briefly as follows: 80% of waiting lists are occupied by children under three years of age; and about 60% of the children on waiting lists are concentrated in five large city areas, including Tokyo, Kanagawa, Chiba, Aichi, and Osaka (NCOLC/RIC, 2012).

3.1.5. Overview of past policy implementation

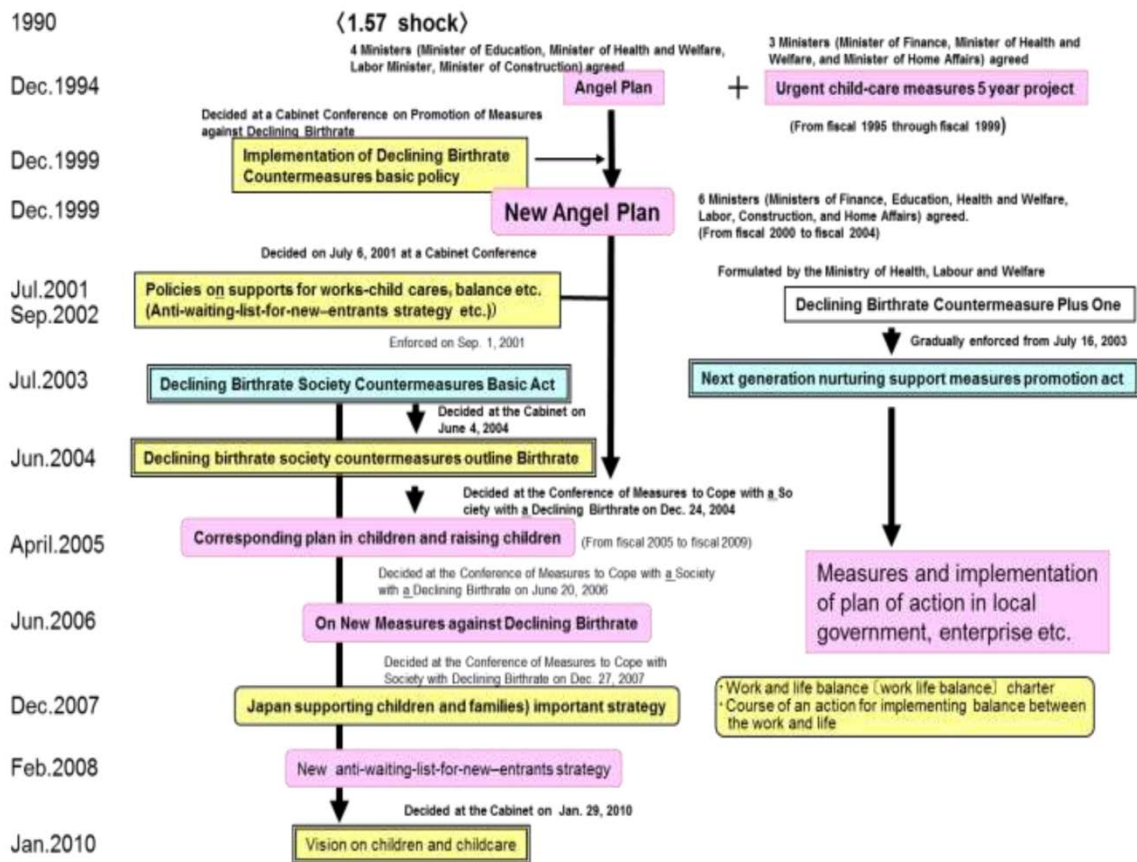


Figure 6: Progress of countermeasures against declining birth-rate.

Source: MHLW (2010).

Since the implementation of the 1994 ‘Angel Plan’, which rolled out urgent childcare measures five-year project, efforts have been made to increase the number of admitted children to day-care centres as a main strategy against Japan’s declining fertility. Specific numerical objectives were set in ‘Anti-waiting-list-for-new-entrants strategy’ in 2001, the target of which was to increase the number of admitted children by 150,000 during the three-year period from 2002 to 2004. In 2005, a further objective was set to increase admissions from 2.03 million to 2.15 million by 2009, based on the

‘Corresponding plan in children and raising children’. Next, the ‘New anti-waiting-list-for-new-entrants strategy’ announced in 2008 aimed to boost the percentage of day-care services supplied to children under three years of age from 20% to 38% and to increase the number of children using day-care centres by one million by 2017. That same year, the state also established the ‘child relief fund’ as part of its supplemental budget for the expansion and improvement of the day-care centre system. As a continuation of these policy efforts, the government’s ‘Vision on children and childcare’ was set up in 2010 with the intent of expanding the service quota of day-care centres from 2.15 million to 2.41 million by 2014, as well as the ratio of children entering day-care centres from 24% in 2009 to 35% in 2017. Also in 2010, an ‘extraordinary team for children on waiting lists’ was organised, and it finalised ‘Anti-waiting-list-for-new-entrants strategy “taking in advance” project’. The ‘taking in advance’ refers to the fact that a system which was to have been implemented in 2013 was adopted early. The project was designed to realise an additional 35,000 day-care centres in the select municipalities. Thus, from 1994 up until the present day, measures for combatting day-care waiting lists have been continuously formulated and implemented with a mind to improving the childcare system’s coverage.

3.2 Macro-implementation

The former section gave an overview of the day-care centre system in Japan, sketched the waiting list problem, and outlined some of the past policy measures taken in response. While it is the Japanese central government

that sets the numerical targets contained in those measures, the municipal governments have the responsibility to provide day-care services according to the Child Welfare Law. In this section on macro-implementation, the paper examines the process by which the national government formulates its programmes and their substance in order to understand what strategies were employed—and how to empower municipalities to achieve the desired policy objective.

3.2.1 Strategies for increasing day-care centres' capacity

As one of the first countermeasures to the declining Japanese birth rate, the 'Angel Plan' (1994) was created at the initiative of MHLW bureaucrats. The Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), the conservative ruling party at the time, placed great importance on the traditional family model and was therefore ideologically reluctant to take significant action against the declining birth rate. However, due to the increased public concern over this issue, the whole government has been forced to grapple with devising countermeasures to the falling birth rate since the 'New Angel Plan' (2000) (Masuda, 2008). In 2000, the first minister in charge of rectifying the declining birth rate was appointed. During the period of the LDP's Koizumi administration, beginning in 2001, deregulation was promoted in various policy areas, including childcare, in line with the development of new liberal structural reform. The Council for Regulatory Reform organised as part of the Cabinet Office led this effort. Many suggestions were proposed for the administration of day-care centres, as the childcare market was directly controlled by the

government based on the assumption that day-care services do not adhere to market principles. The Council pointed to the many ‘regulations’ and ‘bureaucratic structures’ that can be identified in childcare sector, and such supply side problem causes the delay in the reform of this area along with the lack of improvement in productivity and reduction of the cost which impede quality improvement and quantity expansion of the service (Suzuki, 2004).

In line with such deregulation, various revisions have also been made in the legal aspects. In 2001, Child Welfare Law was updated with the provision which promotes privatization of public day-care centres in order to ‘increase supply pertaining to the Daycare Practice efficiently and systematically’ (Article 56-7 (1)). The revision of the Local Autonomy Law in 2003 introduced the designated administrator system in order to promote the commission of public facilities; shortly thereafter, outsourcing licensed day-care centres to the private sector were also developed. In the next year, the abolition of national subsidies covering the operating costs of public day-care centres and the establishment of revenue for general purposes was enforced as a result of the ‘Trinity Reform’ promoted by the Koizumi administration aiming at decentralisation. In 2005, the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications (MIC) announced ‘New guidance for administrative reform promotion in the local public entities’, requiring municipalities to formulate and implement plans for promoting outsourcing day-care centres, the designated administrator system, private finance initiative (PFI), staff

reductions, and other measures. A new Democratic Party administration, which came into power after the government changeover in 2009, also favoured deregulation in spite of its commitment to increase not only the capacity, but also the number of licensed day-care centres providing high-quality day-care services across Japan (Suzuki, 2004).

In addition to the macro trend toward deregulation in governmental policies targeting the declining birth rate, there has also been a tendency to select the lowest-cost options due to the strict budget limitations imposed by the Ministry of Treasury (Masuda, 2008). Consequently, the government has attempted to achieve the numerical objectives of its day-care policy not by promoting the creation of day-care centres—for this would require subsidisation—but by expanding the capacities of existing day-care centres through deregulation and privatisation. Cost has been the determining factor. The slogan associated with the ‘Anti-waiting-list-for-new-entrants strategy’ launched in 2001 represents this concept: ‘the best and greatest service for minimum cost’ (Suzuki, 2004).

3.2.2 Privatisation

As part of the government-pursued deregulation strategy with respect to childcare, there were three main initiatives designed to make private organisations actively participate in the operation of day-care centres. First is the deregulation that expanded the definition of operating organisations of private day-care centres. While legitimate operating organisations were

previously limited to local governments and social welfare organisations, beginning in 2000, other agencies—such as private businesses, NPOs, and school corporations—were permitted to run day-care centres. Second, the public-build and private-operation system was introduced. According to this model, although municipal governments are still the operating organisations, the operation and management of day-care centres is left to private firms or social groups. PFI was also encouraged, by which the local governments outsource centre management by lending land and buildings that were built by private businesses and subsequently purchased by the local government. Likewise, the cases in of private organisations comprehensively taking over management administration duties increased after the introduction of the designated administrator system per the revision of the Local Government Act in 2003. The third trend involved the systematic transfer of public day-care centres to private operators. Through free loaning schemes or rental fees for centres' land and facilities, public day-care centres were turned over to private operating organisations (Hazama, 2012).

Other than deregulation in the name of privatisation, other types of deregulation were also implemented. A prime example concerns day-care staffing rules. The employment of a maximum of 20% part-time childcare staff was permitted in 1998. As part of deregulation, this upper limit was abolished in 2002. Another example relates to capacity criteria. While there were limitations to when day-care centres could admit children beyond their quotas, these limitations were gradually relaxed starting in 1998, and were

abolished altogether in 2010 on the condition that facilities fulfil minimum standards for staff, nursery room etc. Similarly, since 2000, the minimum capacity of small-scale day-care centres has been lowered from 30 to 20 in the hopes of stimulating demand for the creation of new day-care centres. As a third example, land and building codes were relaxed in 2001. In areas with many children on waiting lists, it became possible to substitute neighbouring parks for the on-site playground that were previously required of all day-care facilities. Likewise, room size specifications for day-care centres admitting children below two years of age, as well as fire safety and evacuation criteria, were relaxed (NCOLC/RIC, 2012).

3.2.3 Summary

Whereas municipal governments have the primary responsibility for providing day-care services in Japan, these facilities' operating practices have been considerably restricted by regulations that are uniformly imposed by the central government in an effort to guarantee the equal quality of day-care centres across the country. However, as a result of recent reforms, municipalities have been empowered by decentralisation, deregulation and privatisation efforts promoted by central government designed to make policy implementation easier. Therefore, it can be said that the previous paradigm of top-down style of day-care centre administration has been changing. Although the performance target of achieving zero waiting lists has been set by the central government, since the realisation of this goal depends on implementation on the parts of municipalities, it appears to be

very important to examine how the street-level actors actually engage with their task.

3.3 Micro-implementation

While the Japanese government greatly deregulated the day-care administration system, municipal governments vary in terms of the extent to which they incorporate the relaxed standards into practice. The expansion of day-care service capacities by means of deregulation may result in degradation of the centres' quality. In this micro-implementation section, the paper examines local governments' implementation activities, especially focusing on the large cities having long waiting lists.

3.3.1 Privatisation

In 2005, the Japan National Council of Social Welfare and National Council of Childcare (JNCSW/NCC) reported on the status of privatisation in the sector. Between 2000 and 2004, 94 cases of outsourcing public day-care centre to the private sector and 197 cases of private transfer took place, and 197 and 153 cases, respectively, were planned to be implemented during the period from 2005 to 2009 (JNCSW/NCC, 2005). This number shows the increase in privatisation throughout the nation. Yet, social welfare organisations occupy the largest share (84.8%) of operating organisations compared to private companies (6.6%) and NOPs (7.6%), contrary to the government's expectations about the more active participation of private businesses (ibid). The abolition of national subsidies covering the operating

costs of public day-care centres and the establishment of general revenue in 2004 largely contributed to the development of privatisation (NCOLC/RIC, 2012). The reduced amount of national subsidies is supposed to be compensated for by national tax allocated to local governments. However, due to reductions in the overall national budget, the resulting compensation proved insufficient (JNCSW/NCC, 2005). Therefore, privatisation was accelerated as a means of cost reduction. For example, the city of Yokohama reported that ‘we cannot receive national subsidies to improve public day-care centre facilities, while the privatisation of day-care centres saves us from the expense of improvement costs’ (NCOLC/RIC, 2012).

3.3.2 Deregulation initiatives

Regarding the other types of deregulation aside from privatisation, MHLW (2008) has reported on the greater flexibility in day-care centre quotas. As of December 2008, 1,753 municipalities have day-care centres. Of those, 1,397 (79.7%) have permitted to admit children beyond their original capacity. All ‘designated cities’ have relaxed their caps because they hold a large number of children on waiting lists. On the other hand, in cities with smaller populations, only 36.3% of day-care centres make use of the relaxed capacity criteria. Of the municipalities that are permitted to employ the relaxed criteria, 214 (12.2%) have not done so. The main reason of this is that those municipalities have no children on day-care waiting lists (89.3%). This implies that each local government is able to flexibly determine the use of relaxed criteria according to the actual waiting list situation in its area.

Regarding the introduction of part-time nursery staff, 1,212 municipalities (69.1%) allow part-time employees at day-care facilities. Of those municipalities, part-time employment has actually been introduced in 885 (73.0%). As with the quota criteria, it would appear that each local government judges the need for deregulation according to its assessment of local day-care centre needs.

3.3.3. Problems

In the process of reforming the administration of the Japanese day-care system, many problems have emerged. First, in spite of the significant contribution of deregulation to expanding the quantity of day-care services in areas suffering from long waiting lists, local governments cannot avoid the issue of ‘quality’ conflicting with ‘quantity’. Since the enactment of the 2011 decentralisation laws, local government ordinances have regulated the minimum standards for day-care centres—a task previously assigned to the MHLW. Particularly in 35 municipalities with a large number of children on day-care waiting lists, local governments are able to set up minimum standards that do not meet the guiding criteria set by the MHLW. However, most local governments are very hesitant when it comes to lowering minimum standards out of consideration for providing ‘quality’ day-care services. For example, the city of Kyoto’s minimum standards exceed the national minimum standards, as the mayor actively prioritised quality nursery environments. In contrast, the city of Osaka is the only city to have implemented relaxed minimum standards as of April 2012. The city council

of Osaka regards deregulation as a necessary measure to cope with the day-care centre capacity problem under conditions of fiscal austerity (NCOLC/RIC, 2012). The city of Osaka has actively promoted childcare deregulation. For instance, average admission rates in fully deregulated day-care centres were 223.3% in 2008 and 225% in 2009—more than double their original capacity (Nakayama, 2011). As a result, the density of day-care centres has become quite high, as the numbers of staff have increased along with the numbers of children. Moreover, on some occasions, undesirable means of increasing capacity, such as counting closet and locker space as a part of room area, have been employed to meet the minimum standards (ibid). Although such methods allow more parents to leave their children at day-care centres, such a nursery environment is by no means preferable for children. Receiving the voice of protest from Osaka citizens who claim that such deregulation would threaten the safety of the children and quality of day-care, the city council of Osaka adopted a supplementary resolution to emphasise the safety of day-care service. By contrast, in Tokyo—which has the largest number of children on day-care waiting lists in the country—24 cities and wards appear to be reluctant to introduce relaxed criteria, despite the fact that the Tokyo government itself shows a positive attitude toward deregulation. Nationwide, the Japan Federation of Bar Associations asserts objections against childcare deregulation and seeks to require designated cities neither to permit the use of relaxed criteria, nor to implement them in practice, even when allowed (NCOLC/RIC, 2012).

In addition, various arguments have developed about the quality of privatised day-care centres. Cost savings is the primary rationale for transferring day-care centre management from the public to private sectors. According to Cabinet Office research (2003), the salaries and average age of staff in public day-care centres are 1.4 times higher than in private centres—facts which testify to the high cost structure of public day-care centres. Besides cost, though, some people claim the superior quality of private day-care centres, in terms of facility age, care options for young infants, and opening hours. Private day-care centres tend to operate out of relatively new facilities, admit more infants than do public centres, and stay open longer compared to public (National Childcare Council, 2012). Furthermore, in a study (Shimizutani and Noguchi, 2004) in which the quality of day-care centres was quantified and evaluated by various indicators, private day-care centres gained higher scores than did public ones. However, quality cannot be judged only by hours of operation or building age. More importantly, the quality of staff members, their years of experience and expertise, must also be considered. To keep qualified staff and nursery specialists, it is important to ensure good working environments, adequate wages, and reasonable working hours (Hazama, 2012). It is said that 80% of day-care centres' operational costs derive from labour expenses (NCOLC/RIC, 2012). In the case that market principles are relied upon in the day-care sector, cost reductions necessary to ensure profit margins will drive irregular (not full-time) employment. This raises the issue of day-care quality and the problem of finding qualified, professional staff.

There are some notable lawsuits pertaining to the privatisation of day-care centres in Japan. In 2004, in the city of Yokohama, the parents of nursery-aged children who objected to the privatisation of their day-care centre took the city to court, demanding a halt to privatisation and adequate compensation. This case headed up to the Supreme Court. In the first trial, the city was required to pay compensation, but eventually the case was decided against the plaintiff and in the city's favour. At question in this case was the difference in the perception of day-care quality between the city and its citizen. The city of Yokohama claimed that privatisation improved day-care services by corresponding to various needs—offering, for example, extended, temporary, and holiday operating hours. However, the opinions of the nursery children and their parents were quite the opposite, as they did not perceive (or value) such merits. Instead, they claimed that privatisation had created a lack of leadership and poorer communication caused by fewer numbers of experienced staff, as well as greater safety risks owing to the confusion among children due to changes in their environment and daily activities (Hazama, 2012). This case implies that the perception of day-care quality varies, and the loss of mutual trust relationships between the supply side and recipient side are likely directly linked to perceived drops in day-care quality. Hasty privatisation may arouse a sense of distrust that may aggravate parents' awareness of quality concerns. One possible solution to the abovementioned problems might entail stricter procedural protocols of transfer or incorporating public opinion. Yokohama was not only the city that experienced lawsuits over the matter of day-care centre privatisation. Such

trials motivated many local governments to present privatisation guidelines, and local authorities generally tried to lengthen the period of completing transfers from public operation to private (ibid).

The second problem plaguing day-care reform is the matter of maintaining enough trained day-care staff members. National public expenditure cuts and the industrialisation of day-care led to the rapid expansion of the shares of irregular employees among childcaring staff. According to an MHLW investigation in 2011, the average monthly salary of a day-care employee is 220,000 yen (£ 146), and the average number of years of continuous employment in this sector is 8.4 years. Compared to averages among all workers from all sectors—324,000 (£ 216) and 11.9 years, respectively—day-care staff members have much lower wage and employee retention rates. In fact, the percentage of irregular employment is 53.7% in public day-care centres and 39.4% in private. It is argued that day-care employees' insecure status hampers their motivation and thereby affects the quality of the childcare they provide. In addition, 74.5% of day-care centres have experienced staffing difficulties; the scarcity of day-care staff is identified as a long-term issue for 75.8% of Japanese municipalities (Poppins Co., 2011). The central government aims to grow jobs in this sector by 10,000 in 2011 and 25,000 in 2012, during the implementation of 'the elimination of the waiting list "taking in advance" project' (NCOLC/RIC, 2012). However, it is questionable how to realise this job creation plan, given such staffing problems and the lack of financial resources in local governments.

3.3.4 Summary

In the light of the trends towards deregulation and decentralisation, the municipal governments have relaxed day-care operating criteria and pursued the privatisation of day-care centres. Those tendencies appear to continue with the aim of eradicating waiting lists. Day-care, as an essential public service, requires fairness and equality on top of economic efficiency. As may be understood from the ongoing competition between quality and quantity, many delicate problems are arising on the ground that might defy the central government's expectations. Consensus building with citizen participation is crucial during the process of policy micro-implementation. Street-level officials assume significant responsibility for day-care administration in Japan, and they must consistently balance demands for ever-greater quantity while ensuring quality standards when combating the urgent issue of waitlisted day-care candidates. Moreover, local officials need to manage their cooperation and coordination activities through networks with various actors, such as private firms and NPOs, who are increasingly joining in as pillars of day-care service provision. Along with the high degree of discretion they are given, local officers are required to have advanced implementation skills. On the other hand, it might be difficult for local governments to solve problems stemming from a lack of financial resources. For example, it may not be possible to offer better employment conditions for day-care staff under such tight budgetary restrictions. The central government will likely need to formulate measures that ensure adequate financial resources to support the micro-implementation efforts of

municipalities.

3.4 Case Study Analysis and Implications

Before delving into the case study, this paper identified five points of inquiry, including ‘implementation strategies’, ‘main actors’, ‘degree of success’, ‘obstacles’ and ‘possible solutions’. In summarising the responses to the above points, the paper will suggest implications for future implementation directions.

There have been many policy responses to the day-care waiting list problem at both central and local levels—too many to cover individually in this case study. This case study therefore only describes a part of the policies pursued to eradicate day-care waiting lists in Japan and their implementation. Nevertheless, the paper have been able to identify the main strategies taken by the central government with respect to these policies: the promotion of deregulation and privatisation as part of neo-liberal reform. In the context of such a movement, decentralisation has developed, and discretion has increased; local governments have formulated their own programmes with consideration for public opinion and have implemented them. During this process, various actors in a wide range of sectors, from public to private and across different levels, participate and interact with one another. For example, at the beginning, MHLW officials took the initiative to ensure that day-care centre provision would fall under their jurisdiction, but this responsibility would thereafter fall to local policy makers. In the policy

implementation processes occurring at the local level, not only municipal governments, but also private businesses, NPOs, or individuals as service providers and ordinary citizens as recipients participate. As the number of these actors increases, the values and established practices of each actor can be found, and the implementation process threatens to become more and more complicated. This case study may give a justification for previous implementation studies' recourse to using numerous variables. Among the relevant policy actors, local governments have played an important role in the sense that they now have the responsibility to decide upon the standards governing day-care provision in their areas. Yet, when looking at the degree of implementation success, it seems difficult to uniformly define 'success' in these increasingly complicated bottom-up/adaptive implementation processes in the day-care system.

When it comes to the objective of eliminating the need for waiting lists, the current situation may be labelled as 'failure' simply because this objective remains unsatisfied. This perception may imply that the government keeps failing the implementation. Yet, even if local governments eventually succeed at increasing day-care centre capacity and then waiting lists disappear in line with the central government's ongoing pursuit of deregulation, the policy implementation cannot be judged 'success' if the quality of day-care services is damaged. From this perspective, the case study confirms that the top-down approach does not fit the day-care service policy implementation model. Instead, implementation based on cooperation and consensus

building with multiple actors on the ground takes greater importance. Likewise, it is also difficult to identify particular obstacles hampering the successful implementation of day-care policy in Japan. Given the ideal situation that all children hoping to be enrolled in day-care centres are admitted, the neo-liberal government's limited commitment of financial resources is likely to be the primary impediment to realising this vision. However, given the never-infinite nature of budgets, another obstacle to implementation may be the complexity and multiplicity of the issue at hand, and the solution is likely to chiefly depend on the ability and willingness of street-level administrators exercising their responsibility judiciously.

The central government has already produced its next measure, called the 'Anti-waiting-list-for-new-entrants strategy speed-up plan'. With this plan, the government intends to support municipalities so that they can intensively expand day-care capacity by 200,000 children during the two-year period of 2013 and 2014. Such a support package is composed of five pillars: (1) the active use of state-owned land and leasing methods; (2) emphasis on retaining qualified day-care staff; (3) the promotion of small-scale day-care projects; (4) support for non-licensed day-care centres; and (5) support for day-care service in business offices. With this plan, the central government consistently maintains its preference to support the 'strongly motivated municipalities'. Participating municipal government need to set numerical targets for reducing the number of children on waiting lists and increasing day-care centre capacity. This approach requires each

municipality to take more and more initiative, and the importance of adaptive implementation will increase going forward.

It is crucial to reflect on citizens' needs in order to achieve such quantitative numerical targets without sacrificing the quality of the day-care required. In the case of childcare policy, it would be desirable not only to gain an understanding of public needs from quantitative statistical data, but also to cultivate an environment in which citizens are able to join in the policy process from project formulation to implementation. The establishment of such an environment may be costly in many ways. However, for services so intimately affecting citizens' lives, such as day-care, it become essential to formulate and implement satisfactory policy as the reflection of public opinion and consensus building. The fact that rapid day-care privatisation conducted by local governments has resulted in a series of lawsuits should stand as caution. As it was noted in the case study, the Japanese government has, in neo-liberal fashion, decided to emphasise cost efficiency. Citizens are not excluded from these calculations in the sense that cost-efficiency benefits citizens as consumers (or recipients) of services. At the same time, in the micro-implementation process, it is telling that many local governments are careful about advancing such reform and examining public opinion. This implies that local governments consider the importance of citizens as 'customers'. However, it will be essential not only to try and satisfy citizens with governmental initiatives, but also to provide forums where citizens can actively express their points of view and participate in decision making

about services and their contents that affect them. In this respect, it may be needed to turn the attention to ‘governance’, especially ‘local governance’, as the activity that structures relationships between multiple actors (the government, private businesses, NPOs and citizens) through public network in order to furnish solutions to existing problems and to maintain and manage them (Mayama, 2002).

Overall, policy implementation is a very complicated process. Nevertheless, the government has to have an ideal future vision and diligently formulate concrete measures by which to achieve it. The ability and motivation of street-level bureaucrats—and their power to affect the ‘top’ in the bottom-up process—must be strengthened. The plan formulated and implemented on the basis of governance might potentially be the best way to achieve the goal.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

This research has examined the implementation process of measures designed to counter the problem of long day-care centre waitlists for young children in Japan. The significance of this topic derives from the context of Japan’s seriously declining birth rate; although ensuring adequate day-care centre services has long been a political goal, it seems unlikely to be achieved in the near future, despite the effort. Hence, the paper aimed to reveal the obstacles that continue to hinder successful policy implementation in this arena and tried to obtain implications from the analysis for future implementation activities.

Before the case study, as the theoretical basis for investigating the implementation process, previous implementation studies were reviewed, focusing on two main approaches: the top-down and bottom-up models. The top-down approach starts its analysis from executive decisions and examines how they are transmitted down through the policy hierarchy to the bottom. The approach regards top bureaucrats as the key actors, and others are viewed as impediments. Top-downers see that the street-level bureaucrats' compliance and conformance with authoritative decisions is a requisite condition for successful implementation. By contrast, the bottom-up approach stresses the discretion of administrators on the ground. Although they are confined within the institutional framework structured by the top, street-level bureaucrats are primary actors who substantially implement policies. Bottom-uppers consider that it is not appropriate to distinguish between policy formulation and implementation, rather that implementation takes place along a 'policy/action continuum', in which policy is continuously evolving.

Because both approaches have comparative advantages and their validity depends on the situation, the present paper has adopted both perspectives for the purposes of its case study, and we have analysed policy implementation in the sphere of the Japanese day-care system into macro-implementation (reflective of the top-down process) and micro-implementation (reflective of the bottom-up process). The case study revealed that in the administration of day-care services in Japan, the

government provided the institutional framework via neo-liberal reform tendencies, while simultaneously expanding local governments' discretion through decentralisation. Therefore, the bottom-up implementation approach seems to play a dominant role in Japanese day-care reform.

The primary causes of difficulties in realising the elimination of day-care waiting lists—despite the ongoing policy efforts—appear to be—in addition to the lack of financial resources—the complexity and multiplicity of the problem. As the day-care centre reform initiative proceeds, a greater number of diverse actors with various values will participate, and the nature of the service itself will become ever more diversified—a difficult condition to manage. Although the expansion of the day-care system is the stated objective, the maintenance of service quality is an important issue not to be neglected. Accordingly, it can be understood from the case study that it is crucial for local governments to balance the competing demands of quantity and quality, to understand citizens' needs and reflect their opinions in the policy process, and to cultivate the capacity and willingness to achieve the policy goal.

Naturally, this paper could not avoid certain limitations in attempting to provide a comprehensive review of the issue of day-care waiting lists in Japan and the associated policy implementation process due to limited data collection as well as time and space limitations. Regarding the literature review, since it was unable to cover a large amount of previous studies, there

might be a more appropriate theoretical framework/approach to employ for this kind of a research. In the case study, document based quantitative research limited the degree of understanding of the actual implementation process. Further, the scope of the analysis is confined to the cases related to licensed day-care centres, in spite of numerous other policies implemented around this issue. Consequently, the implication remains general and abstract.

In light of the limitations noted above, further research is clearly needed to contribute to the understanding of Japan's policy implementation in general, and improve the implementation of the measures to curb instances of children on waiting lists in particular. As suggested above, employing the local governance would be one of the most useful ways to conduct further research.

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