

Children's Values, aspirations and expectations (E. Asia)

"Speaking Out! Voices of Children and Adolescents in East Asia and the Pacific" reports on a survey of approximately 10,000 children and adolescents aged 9 to 17, carried out by UNICEF's Regional Office in 17 countries and territories.

Values and beliefs

Overall, "not stealing" (85%) appears to be the most important value, followed by "respecting others" (76%), "telling the truth" (74%), "helping others" (61%) and "free expression" (42%).

Only a small percentage of respondents replied "of little importance" on most of the principles, with the exceptions of Mongolia (19% for telling the truth) and East Timor (11% on not stealing). The principles appear to have less relevance in Mongolia where the lowest positive response rates were found.

The response pattern for the value of free expression is completely different from the other principles. Overall, 16 per cent of respondents say it is of "little importance" in their homes, with higher rates in Myanmar and Indonesia (30%) and Papua New Guinea (28%).

There is a high degree of harmony across all five values, with only minor differences between gender, rural and urban areas and age groups. Children themselves apparently place an even higher value on these principles than their families, as more respondents say they try to apply them in their daily lives than those who say "a lot of importance" is placed on these principles. Almost all respondents (90%) say they apply all the principles but free expression (81%) in their daily lives.

I admire most...

Mothers (21%) and fathers (19%) were the most admired persons. Mothers were strongly admired in Thailand (35%), and Philippines and Indonesia (both 30%), while fathers were especially admired in Mongolia (38%) and East Timor (35%). In Thailand, 58 per cent of all responses named either father or mother as most admired, closely followed by Mongolia and Indonesia (57%). Parents were mentioned least in Papua New Guinea (PNG) (23%), China (26%), Hong Kong (28%) and Macau (29%). Country-specific admired figures, apart from parents, include a music group/singer (China 16%, Viet Nam 15%, Mongolia 13%), friend/neighbour (Cambodia, 25%, Lao PDR 17%, PNG 13%), President/Prime Minister (East Timor 21%), historical figure (Republic of Korea 13%), religious figure (East Timor 19%), notable athlete (Australia 13%), actor/actor/comedian (Philippines 17%).

It seems significant that political and religious figures got little mention (except East Timor), and that two categories out of the top five overall were entertainers (musical group/singer and actor/actress/comedian). In Hong Kong and Macau "nobody" received the highest number of responses (20% and 29%, respectively) and was also a significant response in Lao PDR and Singapore (both 12%).

Aspirations

The largest percentage of survey respondents have ambitions to be a teacher (15%) or a doctor (14%) and other occupations fall well below these two in popularity e.g. policeman (8%) and engineer (5%).

The most preferred occupations at country level include member of the armed forces (Indonesia 10%), office employee (Cambodia 12%), nurse (East Timor 11%), government worker (Lao PDR 11%), engineer (Philippines 14%, Myanmar 12%), and policeman (Lao PDR 13%, Thailand 12%, Malaysia 10%). There are substantial differences between boys and girls (teacher and doctor being much more commonly mentioned by girls, for example, and boys much more likely to mention policeman); rural and younger children are more likely to have ambitions to be a teacher than urban and older children.



Schoolboys at the Ban Hua Rin school in Thailand.

James Abela ELT

Optimism



Two friends in Dili, capital of East Timor.

Four out of five respondents expect their own life will be better or much better than that of their parents, and only 1 per cent expect their life to be worse. Rural respondents tend to be more positive about the future than their urban counterparts. The highest degree of optimism is expressed in China (91%), East Timor (94%) and Viet Nam (92%). Only in Australia (57%) and Cambodia (54%) is the expectation of a better life less than 70 per cent.

Older children are more optimistic on this than younger ones - twenty per cent or more in Australia, Cambodia, Macau and Singapore expect their lives to be about the same as their parents', a response given by 14 per cent overall. Uncertainty, as expressed in "don't know" responses, is highest in PNG (13%), Lao PDR (11%) and Cambodia (9%).

While most respondents were also optimistic about life in their communities in the future, the level of optimism is somewhat lower. Overall, 74 per cent say better or much better, and 19 per cent say about the same. Don't know is very high in Cambodia (22%) and substantial in PNG (12%), Lao PDR, Mongolia and Myanmar (8% in each). Australia has an exceptionally high expectation of worse or much worse (17%), followed by PNG (8%) and Hong Kong (7%).

What government should do

Most children spoke about school or education in relation to what government should do, suggesting that access to education for the poor and marginalized be improved. "Provide scholarships for the poor" was the most frequent overall response (14%); followed by "Build schools in areas now without them" (8%) and "Equal opportunity to education" (3%).

Major country-specific suggestions included "Have amusement park for children" (Hong Kong 15%, ROK 22%, Viet Nam 11%), "Supply stationery/accessories/clothing for children" (East Timor 33%, Indonesia 22%, Mongolia 17%, Cambodia 12%), and "Create a good living environment" (China 19%).

Adapted with kind permission of UNICEF

The source document is available at: <http://www.unicef.org/polls/eapro/values/index.html>

Questions

1. What values did Mongolia and East Timor say were of minimal importance? (2 answers)
2. Is the value of free expression in line with other principles?
3. What is surprising about the people that children admire the most?
4. What is the most popular profession? Who is it most popular with? (2 answers)
5. How many respondents said their own life would be better than their parents?
a. 80% b. 57% C. 70% d. 91%
6. How optimistic are children about life in their community?
7. What do Hong Kong children want their government to do?

Discuss

1. Do you think free expression is important? Why / Why not?
2. Do you think religious and political figures deserve admiration? Why / Why not?
3. What do you think your government should do to help children?

Vocabulary Matching Exercise

| | |
|-------------------|--|
| 1 adolescents | a can say anything that you want |
| 2 respondents | b from a city |
| 3 free expression | c unusual / odd |
| 4 aspirations | d from a village |
| 5 urban | e teenage children |
| 6 rural | f thinks things will be good |
| 7 optimism | g what people want to do in the future |
| 8 substantial | h people who answer a survey |
| 9 exceptionally | i a lot of |
| 10 marginalized | j people who do not get opportunities |

IELTS Style Writing Task

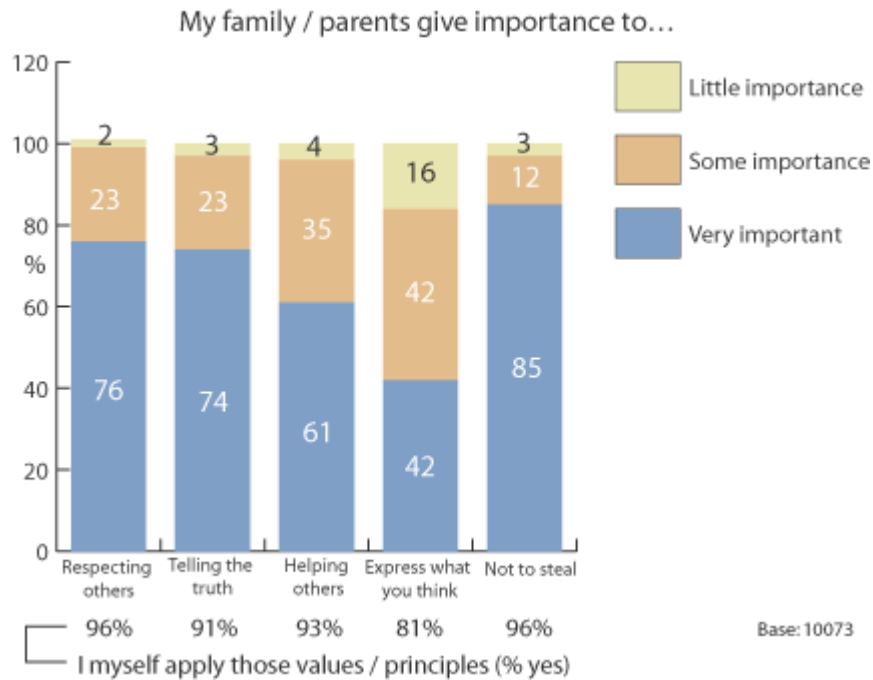
WRITING TASK 1

You should spend about 20 minutes on this task.

The chart below shows what children believe their family's values and beliefs are and how much they apply these in their own lives.

Write a report for a university lecturer describing the information shown below.

You should write at least 150 words.



Teacher's Notes

Comprehension questions

1. What values did Mongolia and East Timor say were of minimal importance? (2 answers)

Mongolia – Not telling the truth

East Timor – Stealing

2. Is the value of free expression in line with other principles?

No, it is not considered as important.

3. What is surprising about the people that children admire the most?

Politicians and religious figures were not highly featured.

4. What is the most popular profession?

Teachers

Who is it most popular with?

Rural younger girls

5. How many respondents said their own life would be better than their parents?

a. 80% (4 out of 5)

6. How optimistic are children about life in their community?

Less optimistic about their communities than about themselves / 74% were optimistic about the future of their communities

7. What do Hong Kong children want their government to do?

Have amusement park for children

Vocabulary matching exercise

This exercise can either be done as a straight vocabulary matching exercise or cut out and turned into a table puzzle.

1e 2h 3a 4g 5b 6d 7f 8i 9c 10j

Writing Exercises

The IELTS style writing exercise based on the reading can either be used to show students how figures should be described or can be given before reading the text and the reading can be shown as an example of how to do it. The discussion questions could also form the basis of writing pieces and are similar to IELTS and TOEFL questions.

Further Reading

This is only a small part of the survey and there is a lot of opportunity to create lessons based on the material on this worldwide survey. The rest can be read here:

<http://www.unicef.org/polls/>

There is also an interesting program by the BBC about the unhappiness of British children.

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/programmes/newsnight/6359161.stm>