RESEARCH ON ARCHITECTS' EXPERIENCES DESIGNING PLAYGROUNDS WITH CHILD PARTICIPATION IN A SAVE THE CHILDREN PLAY-SPACE PROJECT IN SOUTH KOREA

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ABSTRACT

Although child participation has positive effects on the growth and development of children, the way in which children's participation is implemented in many projects remains passive and underdeveloped. With this in mind, this study aimed to examine the experiences of architects who worked with children to design playgrounds for a play-space project by Save the Children in South Korea (SCK). Through this, we intended to expand children's participation and support children's rights. For this purpose, four architects responsible for playground design and who had worked with children in the design process were selected. In-depth interviews (IDI) were conducted with these archtiects. Participants were informed about the IDI process and provided a semi-structured questionnaire before the study was conducted. After receiving consent to participate from the participants, IDI ranging from an hour to two hours were carried out. The contents of IDI were analyzed as qualitative case studies and, through data analysis, six themes were found: 'The workshop helped children to take ownership to have a sense of ownership of the play-space,' 'The workshop helped the architects to better understand the children and their needs,' 'the workshop increased a feeling of the accountability among the architects,' 'Conducting the workshop presented new challenges and difficulties,' 'The participants found sources of motivation to overcome the difficulties', and 'The participants suggested new directions for the upgrade and the operation of the workshop model.' Architects reported that the children's participation was important in designing the play-space. The children's participation workshop model was confirmed as a way to realize children's rights. The results suggested that children's participation workshops should be given more importance in the future and that the children's workshop model should be used when developing child-focused programs and policies that support children's rights.

Keywords: the play-space project, Save the Children in South Korea (NGO), children participation workshop, architects, child rights

INTRODUCTION

The importance of child participation in the design and planning of programs is increasingly recognized in social services. Environmental improvement and related studies focusing on child participation are currently being conducted by researchers. This is helping to drive planners and policymakers to gather and use the input of children in their projects and programs, as well as in the creation of child-friendly cities. Previous studies have shown that child participation has positive effects on the growth and development of children (Davey, 2011; Oh & Chung, 2015; Vis et al., 2011). As such, child participation is an emerging trend in program development. However, actual children's involvement in projects has often been passive due to the practical difficulties in implementation arising from a lack of experience with children, and children's characteristics. However, it has been found that if the right of children to participate in the creation of policies and programs that affect them can be more fully realized in home, school, and community contexts, not only is adult behavior that infringes on the rights of children reduced, but also there is an increase in respect granted to children and their recognition as a valuable citizen of society (Mannion, 2007; Murry, 2019).

How can child participation be realized? In relation to this question, it is helpful to look at prior Save the Children in South Korea (SCK) play-space projects. SCK has been constructing various types of playgrounds and conducting playground improvement projects for children since 2014 (Park et al., 2020). These projects start from the conviction that playgrounds are themselves more than just physical locations for children to play. Play-

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space creation projects guarantee children the right to play, one of the children's fundamental rights. In concert with the notion that play is a basic right is a recognition that play is vital for children's physical and emotional development. In prior studies on SCK's play-space projects, the importance of play in children's development has been confirmed (Oh & Chung, 2015; Save the Children, 2018). In particular, Park et al. (2020) evaluated various types of play-space projects conducted by SCK from 2014 in a multi-faceted manner verifying the performance of the project comprehensively.

The six stages of play-space projects by SCK are recruitment, estimate, selection, business agreement, children's participation workshop, construction, and the opening ceremony (Save the Children, 2018). For the purposes of this study, the children's participation workshop is the most critical stage. Therefore, this study focuses on the workshop in the process of the project concerning children's involvement, and the process, meaning, and effects of the participation of children are examined through the experience of architects performing the workshops. Also, the development of the workshops and children's rights are discussed. Meanwhile, a qualitative study was conducted through in-depth interviews. Qualitative research is a research method to understand the phenomenon through the experiences of the research subjects (Lee et al., 2018), because it is possible to review the process, meaning, and effect of child participation through the experiences of architects who have operated child participation workshops. In line with this, the study aimed at examining the alternatives to expand children's participation and support children's rights.

Based on the above, the research question was "What are the experiences of architects participating in children's participation workshops in children's play-space projects by SCK?"

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

2.1 Participants
Participants in the in-depth interview (IDI) survey were four architects who, since 2017, have been participating in children's play-space projects by SCK, including rural and urban playground environment improvements, school playground support projects, and children's community centers. [Table 1] shows the participants' general characteristics in the IDI survey. The research participants were selected because they all had multiple experiences operating children's participation workshops in play-space projects. First of all, SCK recommended participants, and those who agreed to participate were selected as research paritipants. These study participants were selected

[Table 1] Participants' General Characteristics

Participant	Gender	Age	Participation Period
A	Male	Late 40's	2017 ~ 2019
B	Male	Late 30's	2017 ~ 2019
C	Female	Early 40's	2017 ~ 2019
D	Female	Early 40's	2017 ~ 2019

2.2 3 Analysis Mothod
In order to collect data, the study conducted IDI with the four participants from July to August, 2019. Prior to that, the IDI was reviewed by the Sejong University Bioethics Committee.

The participants were architects who agreed to participate in the research among the architects participating in the child participation workshop recommended by SCK. Participants were informed about the IDI process and provided a semi-structured questionnaire before the study was conducted. Also, they were informed that the interviews could be stopped anytime at the participant's resquest. After receiving consent to participate from the participants, IDI ranging from an hour to two hours were carried out. In addition, if there were additional questions after the interviews, responses were collected from the study participants by email. The interviews were also recorded with the participants' consent. Data were then analyzed by the researchers. This study tried to examine the experiences of architects participating in the play-space projects with children through qualitative

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case analysis, and to understand how they interacted with the children during this process. For this, data were analyzed through intra-case analysis. This is an analysis method that searches for meaningful themes by individually analyzing cases based on the research question, and then finds common themes (Lee et al., 2018).

2.3 Research Rigor and Ethical Considerations

In the study, the researchers made many efforts to minimize the influence of their prior assumptions and prejudices in order to increase the rigor of their inquiry into the issues at hand. Throughout the IDI process and analysis process, the researchers exchanged opinions with each other and tried to analyze the data in a realistic and objective manner. Researchers proceeded from the process of selecting a participant to the interview. Following each interview, data and recordings were shared and checked with the participants. Participants were given the assurance that the research data would not be used for any other purpose than the study itself and the researchers enough explained the voluntariness, a guarantee of rights, confidentiality, and risks and benefits of participating in the study (Padgett, 1998).

3. RESULTS

Through data analysis, six themes were found related to the study question "What are the experiences of architects participating in children's participation workshops in children play-space projects?". In 3.1 the participations' experiences in the children play-space project are reviewed, and in 3.2 six themes identified through data analysis are described.

3.1 Participants' Experience in Play-Space Project

Participant A participated in a total of four creating children play-space projects from 2017 to 2019. They had previously been part of a children's community center project, and were involved in an urban playground project while this study was in progress. Research Participant B had worked with SCK over the course of seven projects and was conducting 3 projects at the time of this study. Specifically, they had participated in community children's center projects three times, and rural playground projects twice. In 2019, they also participated in a community center for children project and two school playground projects. Participant C had participated in the school playground projects, such as at Siheung Elementary School, and had conducted a total of four projects. Research participant D had been participating in children's play-space projects since 2017 and had been part of eight projects to date. In 2017, they were involved in one school playground improvement project and one rural playground project. In 2018, they participated in three school playground improvement projects, and a year later, two created childen's play-space projects and a public works project. At the time of this study, they were participating in one community children's center project. Thus, all participants had significant experience working with SCK to create children's play-spaces.

3.2 Participants' Experience using Children's Participation Workshops in the Project by SCK

The children's participation workshop is a place where children's ideas can be made manifest, and it provides children an opportunity to become invested in the play spaces they are helping to design. Because of the workshop's importance, the architect participants in this study reported that they felt responsible for the success of the workshop and that they made great efforts to administer the workshop effectively. However, there were several factors that made it challenging to conduct the workshop. This included the architects' unfamiliarity with the social aspects of planning and carrying out the workshops with children, the difficulty of drawing commonalities from the input of the various children involved, the process of coordinating the opinions of children with those of other grown-ups, and uncertainty about whether the work of conducting workshops themselves is (or should be) a duty of the architects. Despite these difficulties, the children involved in the workshop happily participated in workshop activities and helped to complete the study design, ultimately leading to changes in the perceptions of a lot of the grown-ups involved. The learning curve for the architects in organizing and carrying out this workshop emphasizes the necessity of regularly conducting these kinds of workshops in order to build the skills and human capital needed to operate them effectively. The participants of the study summarized their experiences operating the child participation workshop using the following phrases, which will serve as foci for our analysis of the collected data:

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'The workshop helped children take ownership of the play-space,' 'The workshop helped the architects to better understand the children and their needs,' 'the workshop increased a feeling of accountability among the architects,' 'Conducting the workshop presented new challenges, and difficulties,' 'The participants found sources of motivation to overcome the difficulties', and 'The participants suggested new directions for the development and the operation of the workshop model.'

3.2.1 The Workshop Helped Children take Ownership of the Play-Space

In the children's participation workshop, the children actively gave input on the design through questions, and discussions. These activities were an opportunity for individual children to discover that their opinions sometimes differed from those of their peers. The ensuing activities and negotiations fostered children's attachment to the play-space and ultimately helped the children develop a sense of ownership.

'Drawing a play diary in a pre-workshop, meeting at the workshop to share thoughts based on the contents of the pre-workshop, and having sufficient time to explain the contents of drawing to other friends. All of these and especially the explaining to friends seems to be an excellent process for understanding children's thoughts' <Research Participant B>

'Realize that my friends and I understand that I can have different opinions and that I need different things, and once again, I think the process of realizing differences is essential. ' <Research Participant B>

'I usually do the workshop about four times (omitted). I gradually become immersed. After the 2nd week, I really do well and concentrate. (Omitted) The architect teacher and the older brothers who come with me are too serious. You really are building this. I really want to do well. (Omitted) When the time is over, everyone is so immersed and likes that they want to do more' <Research Participant C>

'You will naturally know with your body in the field. When you go to something like the opening ceremony, you can convey and feel the degree of attachment you have. (Omitted) It seems that the degree of affection of the children who participated in the process is inevitably different from that given a favorable space' <Research Participant C>

'Children who participated hard in the workshop can clearly understand and feel that it is the result of their contribution, even if they are not drawn by themselves' <Research Participant B>

3.2.2 The workshop helped the architects to better understand the children and their needs

Through the children's participation workshop, the architects hoped to learn about the children's needs for the play space. Accordingly, when conducting the workshop, they showed respect to the children and valued their thoughts and opinions. They tried to draw out the opinions of the children as much as possible by allowing the children to express themselves in a variety of ways. Also, any design decisions or outcomes that might result from the children's input were carefully explained to the children, and consent was sought. Participants in the study emphasized the need for children's rights education before the workshop in order to better communicate with the children. The study participants reported that conducting the child participation workshop was essential in helping them to better understand the children and their needs.

'We do participatory workshops with children, but I think that it is a process of getting to know the area better and understanding children's thoughts more than getting better ideas. Adults talk about needs, but it's not easy for children to distinguish between wants and needs and communicate well' <Research Participant B>

'It is not that children design that there should be no misunderstanding. Design is done by professionals, and experts can get insights from children's drawings and models to see what children want and perceive more of children who have more experience and know better about this school than we do. It is a process of capturing through' <Research Participant C>

'We're just designers. So how can we get children's opinions? After all, what children think is that this is a workshop. This is because children communicate their thoughts by using various expression methods' <Research Participant D>

'I am not designing what children want or what teachers and parents want, so I understand that this is what we need here, and design and explain to the children. Not long ago, when I was briefed on the design results, I received a standing ovation three times. Although the children may act differently from what they drew, I think the children liked it that much because I understood and showed their thoughts' <Research Participant B>

'It would be good if SCK could teach children how to communicate with other children and the main curriculum related to child protection rules. It seems that such education should also be provided to the personnel who conduct children's workshops in advance. ' <Research Participant A>

3.2.3 The workshop increased the feeling of accountability among the architects
The architects considered it essential that they appropriately reflect the children's ideas, expressed during the workshop, in the final design. Therefore, they went to great lengths to understand the children's input as completely as possible throughout the workshop. They also recognized that the experience of the workshop and the time spent with children in the field were necessary. The architects commented that sharing their workshop experiences with other architects could be beneficial in future projects or outside projects. The study participants, as architectural experts, felt that they were responsible for interpreting the children's input and incorporating it into the design.

'I think it may not be possible, even greedy, to accept what children draw or come up with good ideas through participatory design workshops. I don't think this is because the children's experience is low, but rather that it is our job as experts. (Omitted) I think it's up to us to know how experts gather those differences from children and incorporate those thoughts into the design' <Research Participant B>

'Because these projects are not easy for architects and are not of great economic help, the will to do is important, and experience and understanding of the workshops with children seem to be important. Many people are good at design. However, it seems to be the most important to solve this process with multiple parties and read and understand the thoughts of children well' <Research Participant B>

'It would be nice if there was a light seminar or a place to share courses among architects. There will be things to learn from each other. I've done more than ten places so far. (omitted) It's always so new. It would be good to share each person's experience with these projects with children' <Research Participant B>

'Informally, we meet with architects we are close to. (Omitted) We held the initial meeting together and advised the first two people in advance' <Research Participant A>

3.2.4 Conducting the workshop presented new challenges and difficulties
While conducting the workshops the participants encountered difficulties due to both internal and external factors. First, they worried about the potential conflict that might arise between children's input and the input of other stakeholders, especially given the priority traditionally given to the opinions or guidance of managers or funding organizations, not the users, of such projects. This conflict would also manifest in the difficulty of managing the budget of the project, which now had to accommodate the requests of the children themselves as well as the other stakeholders. It was also difficult to operate the children's participant workshop due to differences in the backgrounds and characteristics of participating children, which included both children from rural and urban areas and children of varying ages. Finally, there was difficulty during the operation of the children's participant workshop due to internal factors, such as the architects' personal anxiety resulting from their lack of experience in conducting such workshops and the additional workload of preparing the workshops.

'In Korea, there is no experience in creating a public place with the participation of users' <Research Participant C>

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'The opinions of users are not very important. Because everyone only talks to the manager. We do not have such experiences as a whole' <Research Participant D>

'Depending on who decides the budget, the opinions of the principal, teachers, and adults are more often accounted for than the opinions of children' <Research Participant D>

'As children in rural areas have little experience, there are often limitations in what can be achieved through workshops. It doesn't come out that there are more workshops for children with near-zero experience' <Research Participant A>

' (Omitted) If we work with seniors, we are trying to homogenize the grades as much as possible so that they do not hurt, because lower grades are not completely inclined to be struck' <Research Participant C>

'The part where you try to design yourself according to the standards of adults? Now, I would like to ask each other to acknowledge what they say is a design made by children. The parts that are not well recognized are pretty large' <Research Participant D>

'I hear the stories of other architects who are working on a school-related project; I agree that I enjoy working with them very much. But, they are saying that it is too difficult because what comes next (the problem of coordination with adults) ' <Research Participant D>

'Someone might think that it is important to get users' opinions, and this process must exist, but other people said, 'This is not what you have done so far. Isn't it too complicated?' Also, we do have any experience dealing with elementary school students in our daily lives? There are many challenging things to prepare for the workshop. Also, those are things that I haven't done yet, so I feel burdened with them. ' <Research Participant D>

3.2.5 The participants found sources of motivation to overcome the difficulties
Although the participants of the study reported difficulties in conducting the workshop due to internal and external factors, the participants were motivated by their ability to use the children's input in the play-space design and they worked to preserve those design elements throughout the design process. In addition, the development of staff expertise through the accumulation of experience in the children's participant workshops and changes in other adults' perceptions while overcoming conflicts and difficulties helped to motivate the research participants.

'Prioritizing is the greatest strength. Because it protects us from designing. (Omitted) If you say that children's desire can express things they really want, it can be a bit of defense even if adults talk' <Research Participant D>

'It is relevant to inform children, teachers, and parents that we are designing a space that contains the voices of the children because we have a process of elaborately designed workshops' <Research Participant C>

'When we are asked to observe the form of play, we are personally proud of what is continuously evolving anyway. Which one will be more fun next time? How can I bring out the opinions of the children again? I am so grateful that there are things that are piling up one by one because the staff continues to develop and continue to do business' <Research Participant D>

' (Omitted) It is actually a big deal to offer adults' parking lots as children's play areas through a business. There seems to be a change in perception' <Research Participant B>

'If I say that something different from me is wrong, I will go through the process of explaining and persuading the principal's office even for 2-3 hours. (Omitted) The principal and teachers sometimes change' <Research Participant B>

3.2.6 The participants suggested new directions for the upgrade and the operation of the workshop model
Participants in the study shared improvements related to effective workshop management based on their practical experience in conducting workshops. The sequence and structure of the workshop operation evolved from their suggestions, such as using a play expert before the children's participant workshop to build a relationship with the

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children, or trying to draw out potential children's needs by using various materials in the workshop. Also, the research participants suggested operating the children's participant workshop in the form of a camp or using groups of children of the same or similar age. Another idea was to organize and conduct additional activities with children after the play-space was completed. Above all, they insisted that the number of workshops should be increased, and an increase in the funding to meet the human resources needs of the workshops be provided to keep the workshops running smoothly. In short, the research participants expressed hope that the workshop model would continue to evolve and be operated in a progressive manner.

' (Omitted) From this point on, we also suggested that we would need time to develop a personal relationship before this workshop with children, so it was introduced at that time' <Research Participant D>

'Workshops with children need to be prepared by adults who can be creative regardless of the location. Pre-steps for the workshop also seem necessary' <Research Participant D>

'I hope there are more human resources that can interact at the level of children's eyes. I thought about what if such human resources were mainly children. (Omitted) I think the workshop time should be longer' <Research Participant A>

'After creating the playground, if additional programs are operated after that, I think participation will be higher' <Research Participant B>

'I think it would be better as the number of workshops increases. (omitted) Increasing prerequisites should increase the accompanying cost (omitted). It seems that certain support and time should be allocated for personnel input' <Research Participant D>

4. DISCUSSION

The study examined the experiences of architects who designed playgrounds with the participation of children in the play-space project by SCK. From this, we propose some directions for the development of the workshop model and we will discuss the way child participation reinforces children's rights from a broad perspective.

The architect participants of the study conducted a workshop incorporating various forms of child participation. Through this, they saw that children's thoughts and visions could be more valued and better realized. Participation in the activities of the workshop served as an opportunity for the children to take a sense of ownership of and interest in the children's play-space. Because of this, the architects felt a corresponding sense of responsibility to the children and made more effort to conduct the workshop effectively. However, there were many challenges in operating the workshop due to the architects' unfamiliarity with the process and the varying characteristics of children. Disagreements between children and adults, concerns about whether an architect should engage in an unfamiliar participatory workshop, lack of experience, and the burdens of preparing the workshops made things difficult. Finding a middle ground between adults and children in the midst of these factors was recognized as the greatest obstacle by the architects throughout the workshop's operation. Despite these difficulties, seeing the children happily participate in the workshop activities and realizing that the children's active participation had a positive impact on the final design led to changes in the perceptions of many adults involved. If such workshops are regularly conducted in the future, the practicalities of workshop operation and worries about the workshop management methods can be better addressed as workshop practitioners become more experienced. Thus we recommend that the workshop model become a regular part of playground planning in the future.

Based on the results of the study, the researchers would like to discuss the upgrade direction of the child participation workshop and the ways to expand child participation rooted in children's rights. First, we would like to talk about the upgrade direction of the workshops in the children's play-space project (Park, 2016). According to the research results, workshops on children were found not only to be of strength to architects but also to instill ownership of the play space in children and to increase awareness of children's rights. Therefore, in terms of designing spaces for children, the research participants insisted on the need to further develop the workshop model to understand children and to notice their needs. Accordingly, the organization to support playgrounds

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should propose various types of workshops that can increase children's participation and expand budgets for workshop support and operation. Also, it is necessary to additionally allow access to conferences and seminars where architects can share their experiences with other architects in the project process and develop guidelines for the operation of programs.

The workshop was found to not only be of value to the architects, but also to instill a sense of ownership of creating play-space in children and to increase awareness among all adults involved of the children's rights. This suggests that workshops not only increase the satisfaction of the target audience for the project but can also serve as a basis for children's future participation in a democratic society. This is in line with the results of other prior studies that have reviewed the importance of children's voices and participation (Mannion, 2007; Murray, 2019).

In addition, in order to expand children's right to participate, it is necessary to change the perspective of adults who view children as capable beings (Jeong, 2021). This is because if adults have a prejudice that children have difficulty expressing their opinions, it is difficult to actually realize the children's right to participate.

Second, we will discuss realizing children's rights, and an action plan to expand child participation. Recently, discussions have been actively conducted among local governments on the establishment of child-focused spaces, legal system establishment, encouraging child participation, supporting children's rights, and advocacy activities for the certification of a child-friendly city organized by UNICEF. Of these, encouraging children's participation can be said to be one of the most important activities in terms of guaranteeing children's rights (Park, 2016). Therefore, many local governments that operate child-friendly cities are conducting various child participation activities. However, still, only a small number of children have the opportunity to provide substantive or meaningful input through such activities. Too often children are only asked their opinions as a formality, and all decisions are made by adults (Padgett, 1998). In this respect, the children's participation workshop model, as demonstrated in this play-space project, proposes a direction for how meaningful child participation can be done. The Children Participation Workshop model, in which the children's input is gathered through child-focused activities and has a meaningful impact on the final product or design, can be an exemplary model for solving other children's issues.

Beyond the design goals of the workshop, the children's participation workshop became an opportunity for children and adults to better understand children's rights. It also created a change in the perception of groups on the periphery, such as other children, teachers, parents, and community residents. In follow-up studies, we hope that other children's participation research will focus on children's participation activities to better understand children's rights and foster meaningful changes in societal perceptions of children.

5. CONCLUSIONS

This study aimed at examining the experiences of architects who worked with children to design playgrounds for a play-space project by SCK, and through research results we suggested some directions for the development of the workshop. In this regard, this study presented the following research question "What are the experiences of architects participating in children's participation workshops?". The study results can be summarized as follows. A general opinion among the interviewees was that the children's participation workshop part of the play-space project allowed the children to take ownership of their play-space and that the workshop fostered a feeling of responsibility among the architects to base their final design of the playground on the children's input. Even though there were many difficulties in operating the workshop due to both internal and external challenges brought about by the children's participation, it was found that the children's participation and the opinions they presented played essential roles in completing the playground design and led to changes in the perceptions of other adults involved in the project, such as parents, teachers, and community residents. Also, this study confirmed that the workshop provided opportunities for adults who participated in this project to acknowledge and recognize children's rights in a more explicit way. A limitation of this study is that it does not include the opinions of the children themselves related to their participation in the workshops, nor does it explore their own perceptions of their rights during the design process. In future studies, it would be helpful to gain a clearer picture

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of how the workshop model supports children's rights by using data gathered directly from the children involved in the process, as well as the adults around them. Despite this limitation, we believe the study results clearly support the use of the children's participation workshop model as a way to support and expand children's rights in the play-space design and construction process.

Authors' contributions

All authors contributed toward data analysis, drafting and revising the paper and agreed to be responsible for all the aspects of this work.

Declaration of Conflicts of Interests

Authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

Consent for Publication

All authors read and aware of publishing the manuscript in Revista de Gestao Social e Ambiental

Declarations

[2] Author(s) declare that all works are original and this manuscript has not been published in any other journal.

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