

Japan's STEAM Childcare Method Expands to Thailand and Indonesia Under MEXT's EDU-Port Japan Project

Azalee Gakuen brings its early-childhood method, STEAM Childcare, to Thailand and Indonesia under MEXT's FY2026 EDU-Port Japan Support Project.

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/EINPresswire.com/ -- Azalee Gakuen (Edogawa City, Tokyo), led by CEO Koji Kurusu, has been selected for the FY2026 Support Project under EDU-Port Japan, the initiative of Japan's Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) that promotes Japanese-style education overseas. Through the project, the school will bring its early-childhood education method, "STEAM Childcare" (STEAM[®]), to Thailand and Indonesia.



Mixing colored water and asking why the colors blend, a STEAM Childcare science-play activity at Azalee Gakuen.

Azalee Gakuen leads the project together with the Azalee Group, which it forms with the social welfare corporation Koujukai. The two have researched and practiced STEAM Childcare for years.

“

We want STEAM Childcare to grow into something each country builds with us, with real respect for its own education culture.”

Koji Kurusu, CEO of the Azalee Group

Azalee will work with local education institutions on joint research, model preschools, teacher training, and curricula co-developed in local languages.

Learning Through Play, Taken to the World

As AI and digital technology advance, children need more than the ability to memorize. They need to find their own questions, think, try, and work with others to make something new. Japanese early-childhood education has a

long history of respecting a child's initiative and valuing learning through play. Azalee combined that tradition with STEAM education to develop STEAM Childcare, a method focused on the curiosity and non-cognitive skills that take root in the first six years of life. Being selected for EDU-Port Japan is a first step toward taking that method overseas.

What STEAM Childcare Is

STEAM Childcare reworks the ideas behind Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Mathematics for how children develop between ages 0 and 6. It rests on two ideas: active learning and edutainment.

In active learning, children ask their own questions, "Why?" and "How could I do this?", then test ideas and talk them through with friends. Edutainment treats "I think I can" and "I want to try" as the engine of learning, so children explore while absorbed in play.

Put together, the two create a repeating cycle: notice, question, test, think, and share. Day after day, children build initiative, creativity, collaboration, and persistence, the non-cognitive skills a changing society will ask of them. Teachers work differently here, too. Rather than hand children the answers, they look into the questions alongside them.

Built in the Classroom

STEAM Childcare did not start as theory. Azalee Group managers began shaping the idea in 2019, and group facilities have practiced and refined it since 2021, studying what kind of environment and teacher involvement helps children think and act for themselves. Today it runs through



Exploring how sound travels with a specialist, part of Azalee Gakuen's STEAM Childcare science activities.



Searching for creatures on a tidal flat, where a nature experience becomes an inquiry activity in STEAM Childcare.

everyday activities: nature walks, science play, food education, art, and movement. When children check a change with their own hands, a snack becomes an experiment.

First Tested in Vietnam

In 2022, Azalee signed an MOU with a university in Da Nang, Vietnam, and ran STEAM Childcare lessons and teacher training on site. That work showed the method could travel to different cultures and education systems, and it led to the current EDU-Port Japan project and the move into Thailand and Indonesia.

The project moves ahead with Tovic R. ST, Founder and Strategic Advisor of the Sakuranesia Foundation in Indonesia, and Professor Vilas Wuwongse of the Faculty of Medicine at Mahasarakham University in Thailand.

Milestones

2019: STEAM Childcare concept begins

2021: Adoption begins across the Azalee Group

2022: MOU signed with a university in Da Nang, Vietnam; lessons delivered on site

2023: "STEAM Childcare" (STEAM Childcare®) registered as a trademark

April 2025: STEAM Childcare Research Society established

May 29, 2025: Book "Mirai e Tsunagu STEAM Hoiku" published by Kodansha

November 2025: Exhibited at the Hoikuhaku childcare expo

2026: Selected for MEXT's EDU-Port Japan Support Project; Thailand and Indonesia expansion begins

The Research Society

The research and spread of STEAM Childcare is led by the STEAM Childcare Research Society, established in April 2025 by the Azalee Group Future Creation Institute. Professor Yasufumi Kawamura, of the Faculty of Next Generation Education at International Pacific University and director of the International Science and Education Research Institute, chairs the society. Koji Kurusu, CEO of the Azalee Group, and Mihoko Chiba, principal of Nagisa Kindergarten (Azalee Gakuen), serve as vice-chairs. The society now has about 100 corporate and individual members, and 15 preschools have adopted STEAM Childcare.

In May 2025, Kodansha published "Mirai e Tsunagu STEAM Hoiku," which collects examples from infant, toddler, and food-education settings. In November 2025, Azalee introduced the method to educators nationwide at the Hoikuhaku childcare expo.

Comment From the CEO

"STEAM Childcare did not come from special materials or equipment," said Koji Kurusu, CEO of

the Azalee Group. "It grew out of the daily work of teachers paying close attention to the 'why' and 'I want to try' on children's faces. Japan's long tradition of learning through play trusts a child's initiative, and we think that is where the creativity and curiosity children need for the years ahead begins.

"In Indonesia we work with Tovic R. ST of the Sakuranesia Foundation, and in Thailand with Professor Vilas Wuwongse of Mahasarakham University. We don't want STEAM Childcare to arrive as something imported from Japan. We want it to grow into something we learn and build together, with deep respect for each country's education culture.

"Being selected for EDU-Port Japan recognizes the practice and research we have put in, and it is a new start for sharing what Japanese early-childhood education is worth with the rest of the world."

What Comes Next

In both countries, the next steps are field surveys and model preschools, teacher training, and curricula written in the local language, developed with local educators rather than dropped in from outside. What the team learns abroad will feed back into how Azalee runs STEAM Childcare at home in Japan.

About Azalee Gakuen

Azalee Gakuen, based in Edogawa City, Tokyo, operates certified children's centers (nintei kodomo-en) and other early-childhood facilities. Together with the social welfare corporation Koujukai, it forms the Azalee Group, which works on the practice and research of early-childhood education and care. STEAM® is a registered trademark of Azalee Gakuen.

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