

Survey on Beliefs Regarding Reading Picture Books for Parents, Pre-service Teachers, and In-service Teachers of Elementary School Students in Japan

－日本の小学生の保護者、教師（希望者、現職含む）に対する絵本の読み聞かせ に関するビリーフ調査－

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I Background & Research Purpose

1. International Background on Shared Reading

Most Japanese couples who are raising children in Japan today were exposed to at least six years of English during their junior high school and high school years. Results vary as to the success or failure of these six years of English language education in terms of developing communicative competence among today's young to middle-aged Japanese citizens. While most Japanese may not be able to maintain a conversation in English, it seems likely that they may be able to handle reading English language children's books aloud.

Thus far the research focused on the impact of use of storybooks at home comes almost invariably from a Western point of view and typically with English as the L1 under investigation (Bus, Ijzendoorn, & Pellegrini, 1995; Dickinson & De Temple, 1998; Sénéchal & LeFevre, 2002). Some studies are conducted within family literacy programs or at least sample an at-risk population for whom English not an L1, typically immigrant communities in rural or inner-city regions (Jordan et al., 2000; Shanahan, Mulhern, & Rodriguez-Brown, 1995). Relatively few studies have been published in English about similar programs in non-English speaking countries (Huang, 2013; Yeo, Ong, & Ng, 2014), and it appears no studies have been published regarding family literacy development in L2 in EFL contexts.

This paper investigates Japanese parents, pre-service, and in-service teachers beliefs concerning the use of storybooks as a language learning tool in order to begin establishing how Japanese parents and educators feel about shared reading in their L1 (Japanese). Understanding these beliefs is of paramount importance prior to any subsequent research investigating their feelings when engaging in shared reading in an L2 (English) insofar as this understanding will provide baseline measures of L1 reading beliefs against which L2 beliefs can be compared.

The Parental Reading Belief Inventory (PRBI) was developed by DeBaryshe and Binder (1994). It is a 42 item Likert-style questionnaire. PRBI scales were created *a priori* and validated through factor analysis, which reportedly resulted in the following seven subscales: Teaching Efficacy, Positive Affect, Verbal Participation, Reading Instruction, Knowledge Base, Resources, Environmental Input. DeBaryshe and Binder found strong correlations between what parents

reported believing and what they reported actually doing. The findings were independent of ethnicity but did show some correlation to parental level of education ($r = .39, p < .001$) and family income ($r = .33, p < .001$). Wu and Honig (2010) translated and adapted the PRBI to a Taiwanese context and ended up retaining only 24 items and five of the original subscales. They did echo the findings that level of education of the mother was correlated with the richness of the home literacy environment (HLE). In Singapore, Yeo, Ong, and Ng (2014) then used an adapted version of Wu and Honig's (2010) adaptation, settling on a 30-item version of the PRBI. With respect to reading beliefs, parents' efficacy in supporting literacy development before their child attended school positively predicted reading competence, as did parents' affect and verbal participation in fostering reading interest. However, when parents' education level and children's age were controlled, hierarchical multiple regression analyses found that family literacy activities contributed more unique variance to children's reading outcomes and reading interest than did parents' reading beliefs. Most recently, however, Gonzalez, et al (2013) cast some doubt on the reliability of the PRBI. Through confirmatory factor analysis, they found good fit for only two of the seven *a priori* subscales (Resources, Reading Instruction). The subscale for Teaching Efficacy exhibited very poor fit ($CFI = .238$).

(Aaron C. Sponseller*)

2. Importance of Shared Reading in MEXT Course of Study

The importance of the use of picture books is particularly emphasized by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) in the new course of study (from 2018). According to MEXT, the foundation of communication begins with having children experience *listening* to others. To this end, MEXT specifically cites using picture books as pedagogically useful devices. Since picture books require the reading of information from pictures in order to understand the situation while listening to the storyteller, it is easy to help the children experience and understand as stipulated by MEXT. Also, depending on the contents of the picture book chosen, students can experience things impossible in real life. Additionally, some stories incorporate life lessons. As described above, the MEXT highly recommends reading of picture books in foreign languages, and the creative use of such books alongside extension activities such as making original picture books in groups with subjects of picture books, using stories and dramas in toy theaters is considered sound pedagogical practice.

MEXT has developed picture books for middle schoolers as supplementary materials and distributed them to elementary schools throughout the country. They also suggest classroom teachers keep the following points in mind when reading the picture books.

1. Teachers combine gestures and read expressively. Gestures and facial expressions become important information sources for children to understand narratives.
2. Rather than reading the wording on the picture book as it is, teachers should try asking questions about pictures occasionally, thus drawing children into the world of stories.
3. When turning the page, ask students questions such as what will happen next, giving the students an interest in the development of the next portion of story, so as to increase

student interest in what will happen next. This will make the reading more interesting and effective.

In recent years, studies on the utilization of picture books have also been increased. For example, in the following papers, based on the significance of using picture books, a concrete method of learning how elementary school teachers can work without difficulty and a list of picture books according to the stage of development are listed (大川, 2014; 吉村 et al., 2017).

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II Methodology

1. Instrumentation

For the purposes of the research presented here, we modified the PRBI to meet our needs. First, we determined that asking teachers to respond to the items on the subscale of *Teaching Efficacy* was unnecessary and, therefore, we eliminated those items. We also amended a few of the original PRBI items which were worded problematically. The final product is what we are tentatively referring to as the *Parental Reading Belief Inventory – Japanese, Modified* or PRBI-JAM. Please see Table 1 for the full list of items by construct

Two native speakers of Japanese who are highly proficient in English translated each item independently. The first translator was a doctoral student studying English language education, was very familiar with survey research and item construction, and therefore provided a rather academic translation of the items. The second translator was a non-academic but familiar with the interest of the researcher. The English question and Japanese translations were put into tabular form for easy comparison against one another. Four native Japanese speakers assessed these translations and identified which translation they thought superior. One of these raters was the same person who provided the non-academic translation. Others were native Japanese speaker professors holding PhDs in applied linguistics or early childhood education.

A small number of demographic questions were included at the beginning of the survey. Pre-service teachers were asked to provide their year at university as well as if they had any experience engaging in shared storybook reading. In-service teachers were asked to provide their age, gender, number of years teaching, whether they were full-time or not, and if they had engaged in English activities in their classroom(s).

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2. Participants

Pre-service elementary educators (n = 132) were drawn from undergraduates and graduates at Hiroshima University who were majors in Elementary Curriculum and Development. In-service elementary educators (n = 92; 67.4% female) were drawn from multiple sources. Thirty-six respondents completed the survey during a training session hosted by Hiroshima University in the Faculty of Education, while the remaining 56 completed the survey voluntarily at the request of two of the co-investigators (Fukazawa, Kashiba). The average age of in-service educators was 38.7 years old, with the youngest respondent being 23 and the oldest being 61.

Parents, specifically mothers (n = 300; forthcoming), are being sampled from across Japan. The sample has been purchased through Qualtrics and is currently being gathered.

Table 1: *Parental Reading Belief Inventory – Japanese, modified (PRBI-JAM)*

POSITIVE AFFECT

1. 児童に本を読んであげるのは簡単だ。
2. 児童と本を読むのは楽しい。
3. 児童と本を読むのは私にとって特別な時間だ。
4. 私の児童は本を読んでもらうのを楽しんでいると思う。
5. 本を読んであげる時、私は児童をより近くに感じる。
6. 本を読む時、児童をしつけないといけない。
7. 児童に読書を好きになってほしい。
8. じっとしていないので、児童に本を読んであげない。
9. 児童の好きな時にいつでも本を読んであげる。
10. 児童が興味を失わないよう、本を読む時は楽しんでいるそぶりを見せるよう心がけている。

VERBAL PARTICIPATION

10. 児童が興味を失わないよう、本を読む時は楽しんでいるそぶりを見せるよう心がけている。
11. 児童は本から新しい言葉を学ぶ。
12. 読書は、児童を話し上手・聞き上手にする。
13. 児童は本で読んだ多くのものの名前を知っている。
14. 児童と読書する時、児童にも読んでもらうよう心がけている。
15. 児童と読書する時、児童もにたくさん質問をする。
16. 児童と読書する時、児童に本について質問してもらうようにしている。
17. 児童と読書する時、絵についても本を読むのと同じくらい話をするようにしている。

READING INSTRUCTION

18. 児童が文字や基本的な言葉を学ぶように、児童と本を読む。
19. 親は児童が学校に入る前に本の読み方を教えているべきだ。
20. 私の児童は読書するには早すぎる。
21. 児童と読書する時、本に出てくる色々な文字や数字を、児童に指摘してもらうようにしている。

KNOWLEDGE BASE

22. 物語を児童の実生活に近づけたものにしようとしている。
23. 物語は児童の想像力を豊かにする。
24. 児童は読む物語から教えるを学ぶことができる。
25. 児童は読書で自分が体験したことのないことも学ぶことができる。
26. 児童は本から生きていくのに大切な術も学ぶことができる。

RESOURCES

27. 忙しすぎて、児童に本を読んであげることができない。
28. 何も読むものがないので、児童に本は読まない。
29. 本を読んであげる物理的な環境がないので、児童に本を読まない。
30. もっと重要なことがあるので、児童に本は読んであげない。

ENVIRONMENTAL INPUT

31. おしゃべりな児童、物静かな児童、どちらも生まれつきで、教師が大きく影響することはない。
32. 児童の言語能力は、遺伝によって決まる。

Considering the eventual purpose of the research results relies heavily upon the results of parental

response, purchasing a sample from a professional source was decidedly a better option than relying upon a convenience sample drawn exclusively from the local region or from the personal networks of the researchers.

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3. Procedures

Participants were informed that their participation in the survey was entirely voluntary and anonymous, and that their responses were to be analyzed quantitatively in a manner which would anonymize their responses still further. They were further notified that their responses or decision not to participate would in no way impact their completion of the course (pre-service educators) or the training program (in-service educators). Their completion and submission of the surveys, which were distributed and collected in-person by the researchers, was taken as provision of consent.

III Results

1. Parents

Data for parents is forthcoming but was unavailable at the time analysis was conducted for the purpose of this report.

2. Pre-Service & In-Service Educators

We first checked the reliability statistics for each of the datasets (pre-service and in-service educators) and in composite.

Construct	Group Alphas		Composite Alpha
	Pre-Service Ts	In-Service Ts	
Positive Affect	.623	.671	.730
Verbal Participation	.795	.749	.821
Reading Instruction	.549	.346	-.037
Knowledge Base	.774	.712	.904
Resources	.703	.807	.773
Environmental Input	.664	.233	.787

Table 2: *Reliability Statistics by Group/Composite*

An initial exploratory factor analysis (EFA) (orthogonal, varimax rotation) found two emergent factors. Items 1, 6, and 9 failed to load on either of the two constructs. Construct 1 had significant factor loadings for items 2-5, 7, 8, 10-13, 19, 20, and 23-26. Construct 2 had significant factor loadings for items 14-18, 21, and 22. An initial assessment of these factors illustrates that construct 1 is reflective of beliefs about the utility of reading with children and/or how parents feel when reading with children. Construct 2 appears to be reflective of techniques employed during shared reading practice.

Items 27 through 32 had poor factor loadings and showed little semblance of a unitary construct. Visual inspection of the scree plot (see Figure 1) also indicated a fifth or six factor was not likely

present in the dataset.

Therefore the two hypothesized constructs of *Resources* and *Environmental Input* were eliminated in order to simplify subsequent analysis of the remaining four constructs more directly

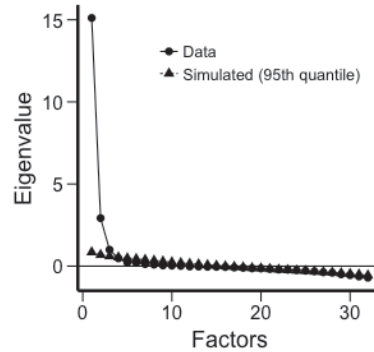


Figure 1: Scree Plot (EFA)

related to beliefs about reading. Neither of these constructs are composed of items that ask about respondent beliefs, so their elimination was not deemed problematic.

Table 3. Factor Loadings for PRBI-JAM Items 1-26 (CFA)

Item	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Uniqueness
1	.	.	.	.	0.649
2	0.926	.	.	.	0.152
3	0.556	.	.	.	0.382
4	0.903	.	.	.	0.195
5	0.785	.	.	.	0.226
6	.	.	-0.460	1.015	0.266
7	1.010	.	.	.	0.095
8	-0.941	.	.	.	0.239
9	.	.	1.134	.	0.225
10	0.651	.	.	.	0.451
11	0.988	.	.	.	0.096
12	0.900	.	.	.	0.179
13	0.866	.	.	.	0.257
14	.	0.477	.	.	0.533
15	.	0.858	.	.	0.298
16	.	0.898	.	.	0.257
17	.	0.841	.	.	0.333
18	.	0.473	.	.	0.434
19	0.456	.	.	.	0.439
20	-1.007	.	.	.	0.158
21	.	0.679	.	.	0.495
22	.	.	.	.	0.626
23	1.024	.	.	.	0.061
24	0.968	.	.	.	0.098
25	0.994	.	.	.	0.072
26	0.934	.	.	.	0.120

Next, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) specifying four factors was conducted. The results were nearly identical to the prior EFA. Please see Table 3 for the results of the CFA, with an

additional item (22) failing to load on any of the four constructs. Further analysis will be conducted following complete collection of the response sample of 300 Japanese mothers.

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IV Discussion, Limitations, & Future Directions

The conclusions presented here are preliminary. However, these initial findings indicated the PRBI-JAM has poor reliability. Six of the seven hypothesized constructs were measured here, however only two constructs emerged from this initial analysis. Even after reducing the number of items and specifying four factors, the data clearly suggested the presence of merely two factors: Beliefs about reading, and shared reading techniques. At present we are inclined to agree with Gonzalez, et al (2013) that the reliability of the PRBI is suspect and that "although the subscales of the PRBI model are intuitively appealing, they warrant continued investigation." (P.134).

The original PRBI was created for use with parents, not educators. Moreover, the sample analyzed here was one of convenience. The collection and analysis of a sample of Japanese mothers to the PRBI-JAM is necessary before we begin to draw conclusions.

Further analytic approaches could include exploring possible confounding variables such as age, gender, years of experience teaching, and socioeconomic status of the respondents. More robust analytic procedures include applying item response theory or Rasch approaches to the data in order to validate the PRBI-JAM. Considering the recent research in the USA which casts doubt on the hypothesized constructs of the PRBI (Gonzalez, et al., 2013) as well as the fact that this is the first attempt to validate the PRBI-JAM, more stringent validation procedures should be considered.

Finally, increasing the item pool and reconsidering the labeling of constructs/subscales in subsequent iterations of the PRBI and/or PRBI-JAM is likely necessary. The original PRBI has many double-barreled items and items which claim to measure self-efficacy but which fail to conform to the standard "I can..." item stems. Moreover, the labeling of the constructs on the original PRBI (Debaryshe & Binder, 1994) appears problematic. As an example, the subscale of *Verbal Participation* includes items 10 – 12:

10. *When we read I try to sound excited so my child stays interested.*

11. *Children learn new words from books.*

12. *Reading helps children become better talkers.*

Item 10 inquires about what a parent (or educator) does when reading, item 11 about child vocabulary acquisition through reading, and item 12 about child learn oral skills acquisition through reading. Each of these items belongs on the PRBI/PRBI-JAM, however their clustering within the same construct does not seem intuitive or appropriate.

In conclusion, this initial attempt to evaluate the PRBI-JAM has generated more questions than answers. Continued investigation of the beliefs of parents and educators concerning shared reading in L1 is critical for at least two reasons. First, it informs educators about societal beliefs in Japan regarding L1 acquisition through storybook reading, which is extremely valuable in its own right. Second, given the recent push by MEXT to incorporate English storybooks into the elementary classrooms, educational researchers and policymakers will eventually want to explore beliefs and

practices related to L2 storybook use in Japan. Understanding Japanese beliefs about L1 shared reading will provide a baseline against which beliefs about L2 shared reading can be compared.

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