

【原著論文】

Development of Teaching Materials to Enhance Input for Japanese Elementary Students: Enabling Autonomous and Independent Reading through Rewriting of an English Picture Book

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Abstract: The purpose of this study is to set up standards to select and to explore appropriate reading material as input for Grade 5 and 6 elementary school pupils in Japan as a supplement to a given government-approved textbook.

Published graded readers were rewritten so that the pupils would be able to read the material in pairs, trios, or independently in the end. In order to verify the effectiveness of this material, some questionnaires were given in each lesson to examine the students' motivation toward reading, as motivation is known to be crucial in any learning.

要旨：本研究の目的は、日本の小学校5、6学年を対象に、インプットとして検定教科書を補完する形でのリーディング教材を選定するための、基準を明らかにすることである。

児童が最終的にペアやトリオ、または一人で読めるように、出版されている Graded Readers (段階別読本) は書き直し教材化する。その教材の有効性を検証するために、各授業で振り返り調査を行い、学習において重要であるとされる「読むことへの動機付け」についても明らかにする。

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Key words: Project, Rewriting, Graded English Picture Books, Government-Approved Textbooks, Independent Reading

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0. Introduction

Since the incorporation of English as a subject in the Japanese elementary school curriculum, this field of research in language acquisition has gained significant attention (see, e.g., Yorozuya, *et al.*, 2022). However, though uses of English picture books are repeatedly emphasized in the Course of Study (revised in 2017) as a complement to teaching material, no evidence-based research on their utility in enhancing reading skills at a public elementary school level has yet been carried to our knowledge¹⁾.

The objective of this study is to examine and to explore appropriate input as reading material in order to make up for a lack of input from the textbook. We

used very basic graded readers as a starting point, but they were still far too difficult for Japanese learners of English, who take only a 45-minute class twice a week. It is thus important to set up standards to choose appropriate reading material and to rewrite it so that the pupils will be able to read it in pairs, trios, or, lastly, independently. Thus, we make use of a basic picture book, chosen from a collection of graded readers, appropriately rewritten for the pupils.

1. Background of the Study

1.1 Objectives and time allotments for English teaching in the Course of Study

In Japanese elementary schools, English is dealt with once a week for 35 class hours per year (each

class hour lasts 45 minutes) as Language Activities in the 3rd and 4th grades, while it is taught twice a week for 70 class hours per year as a formal subject in the 5th and 6th grades. We expressly used “dealt with” and “is taught” because for Grades 3 and 4, English is dealt with through language activities (Foreign Language Activities), while English as a subject is taught for Grades 5 and 6.

The Course of Study for Foreign Language Activities specifies that the objectives are to “develop pupils’ competencies that form the foundation of communication through listening and speaking” for Grades 3 and 4, and to “develop pupils’ competencies that form the base of communication through language activities of listening, reading, speaking and writing in a foreign language” for Grades 5 and 6.

1.2 Teaching materials pupils use at public elementary schools

The teaching materials for Grades 3 and 4 are *Let's Try 1* and *Let's Try 2*, developed and written by the government and distributed to all public schools, and for Grades 5 and 6, six published government-approved textbooks are on the market, and each city or district decides which one of them to use.

In order to hold bird's-eye views of the textbook materials, we will show some of the contents of *Let's Try 1* and *2*, and of one government-approved textbook, *New Horizon Elementary English Course*, which was chosen because it is the most widely used nationwide, in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1 Contents of Supplementary Teaching Materials, *Let's Try 1* and *Let's Try 2* for Grades 3 and 4 (2018)

<i>Let's Try 1</i>		<i>Let's Try 2</i>	
Units	Contents	Units	Contents
1	Hello!	1	Hello, world!
2	How are you?	2	Let's play cards.
3	How many?	3	I like Mondays.
4	I like blue.	4	What time is it?
5	What do you like?	5	Do you have a pen?
6	ALPHABET	6	Alphabet
7	This is for you.	7	What do you want?
8	What's this?	8	This is my favorite place.
9	Who are you?	9	This is my day.

Table 2 Contents of One Government-Approved Textbook for Grades 5 and 6 (2020)

Contents of the Textbook for 5 th Graders		Contents of the Textbook for 5 th Graders	
Units	Contents	Units	Contents
1	Hello, friends.	1	This is me!
2	When is your birthday?	2	How is your school life?
3	What do you want to study?	3	Let's go to Italy.
Check Your Steps 1		Check Your Steps 1	
4	He can bake bread well.	4	Summer Vacations in the world
5	Where is the post office?	5	We all live on the Earth.
6	What would you like?	6	Let's think about our food.
Check Your Steps 2		Check Your Steps 2	
7	Welcome to Japan.	7	My Best Memory
8	Who is your hero?	8	My Future, My Dream
Check Your Steps 3		Check Your Steps 3	

We will also cite sample pages of them in Figures 1 to 4 in order to assess and understand how little input the pupils receive. To note the development of the ma-

terials across four grades, the same theme, greetings and introductions, is selected for comparison. Figure 3 is for 5th graders, and Figure 4 for 6th graders.

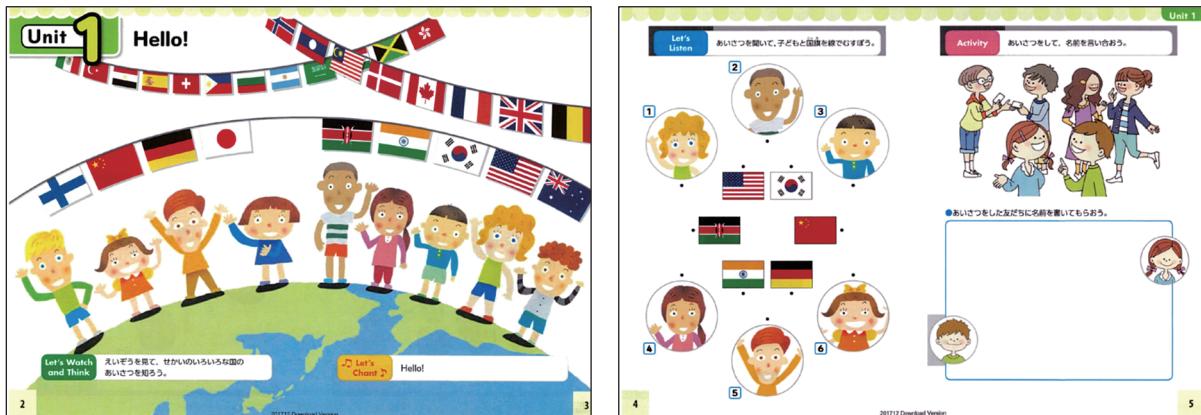


Figure 1 Sample Pages, Unit 1, "Hello!" in *Let's Try! 1* for Grade 3

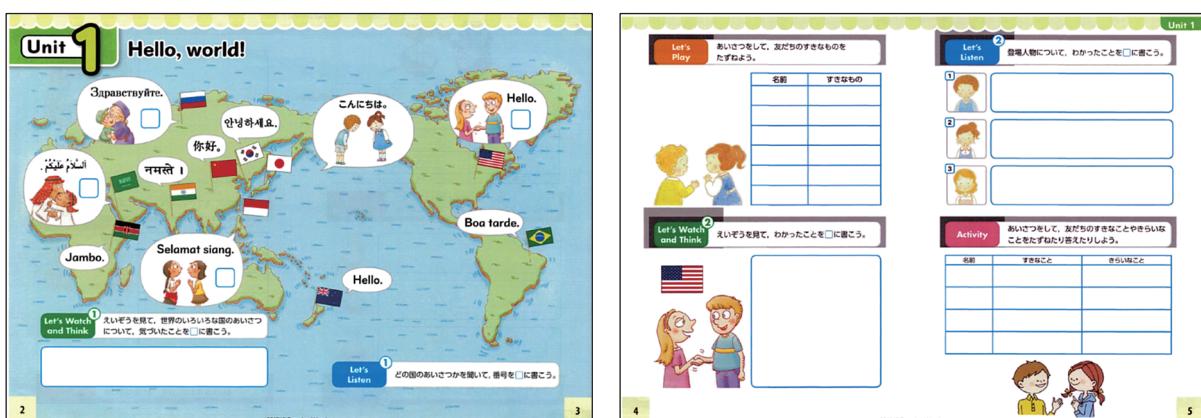


Figure 2 Sample Pages, Unit 1, "Hello, world!" in *Let's Try! 2* for Grade 4



Figure 3 Sample Pages, Unit 1, "Hello, friends." in one Government-Approved Textbook for Grade 5

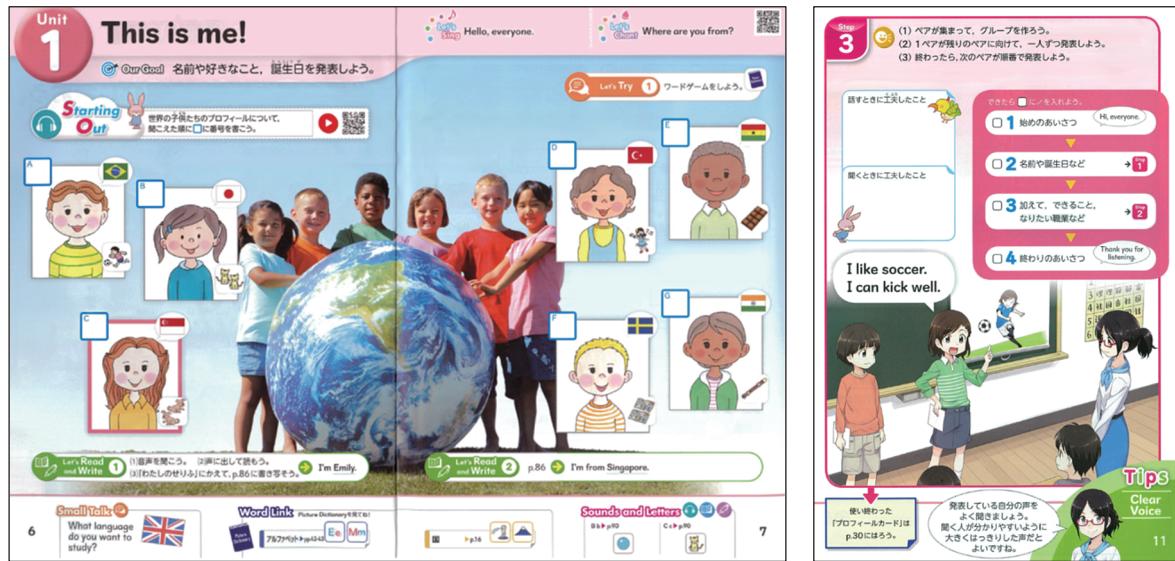


Figure 4 Sample Pages, Unit 1, "This is me!" in one Government-Approved Textbook for Grade 6

In Figure 1, the first four pages of *Let's Try 1* for Grade 3 introduce learners to the names of various countries and their corresponding flags. The 3rd graders only say "hello" and their names.

In Figure 2, the first four pages of *Let's Try 2* for Grade 4 are one step more advanced, dealing with greetings and asking and answering questions about likes.

In Figure 3, the first three pages of one of the 6 government-approved textbooks for Grade 5, marking a still further advanced level, involve English words for reading and writing names, and asking and answering questions about likes and abilities through exchanging name cards. In Figure 4, the first three pages of a textbook for Grade 6, reaching the most

advanced level for elementary schools, focus on names, birthdays, likes, abilities, dreams and closing words in a presentation form. Learners are asked to make a simple profile of themselves.

At a glance the English input provided to Japanese elementary school English learners through teaching materials or textbooks, particularly in terms of vocabulary and structures or expressions, is very limited and insufficient. It is worth ascertaining here the number of words that the national curriculum prescribes for pupils at each educational level from elementary to high school. The specific number of words designated for learners at the three educational levels is presented in Table 3.

Table 3 Number of Words to Learn, Specified by the Course of Study for Each Level

Grades	School levels	Number of Words	Maximum Number of Words at Each Level
By Grade 6	Elementary	600~700	700
By Grade 9	Junior High	1600~1800	2500 (= 700 + 1800)
By Grade 12	Senior High	1800~2500	5000 (= 700 + 1800 + 2500)

As can be seen, by the time they graduate from elementary school, students are exposed to up to 700 English words, and the concrete vocabulary to be taught is not specified. Having observed the given teaching materials, and noting that there is no necessity to use English outside the classroom, it should clear that Japanese, not English is utilized as a medium of instruction in the classroom.

1.3 Goal of lessons in reading for Grades 5 and 6

While it is of course the case that a larger vocabulary is beneficial, it is also imperative to emphasize that the primary objective of reading instruction at the elementary school level should be to cultivate independent readers.

The Course of Study for Foreign Languages for Grades 5 and 6 specifies the following objectives for pupils: (1) to identify letters of the alphabet written in

block letters and pronounce the names of the letters, and (2) to understand the meanings of simple words and phrases and basic expressions for which they are sufficiently familiar with the sounds. In order to accomplish these objectives, it stipulates under contents (a) activities in which pupils look at letters written in block letters and identify what letters they are and whether they are upper or lower case, (b) activities in which pupils look at letters written in block letters and properly pronounce the names of the letters, (c) activities in which pupils obtain necessary information from notices and leaflets, etc., with contents consisting of simple and familiar topics in everyday life, and (d) activities in which pupils identify the sounds of simple words and phrases and basic expressions which they are sufficiently familiar with from picture books, etc.

It should be noted that what the Course of Study specifies is the bottom line for all the pupils at public schools, and that it is desirable for learners to advance beyond these fundamental competencies. It is thus important to develop the ability to read and comprehend the meanings of books or stories appropriately modified or rewritten for the pupils. Thus, this study tries to verify that reading competence can be facilitated through collaboration with peers, or in trios in group activities, and, ideally, independently, when reading a rewritten graded reader picture book incorporated into one of the units in the government-approved textbook. Unless the pupils are motivated toward foreign language acquisition and have become able to recognize the interest and the importance of using it in a new context, they will inevitably tend to stop learning it as a fun means of communication².

The lesson involved, as a whole, takes the form of a project. We have claimed since 2007 (Higashino & Takashima, 2007) that lessons should take the form of a project which entails 6 or 7 class hours as a unit with clear end-goals, such as reading a picture book by oneself, which is clear to all learners from the beginning. We have also claimed that since the project clarifies each step as a process leading to accomplishing the end-goal, which is shared by all the learners, these characteristics efficiently enhance and motivate learning, as the learners know where they are, how much they have done, and how much more they need to learn to reach the goal. This contrasts sharply with simply covering or following the exercises in the materials or textbooks, however carefully (Higashino &

Takashima, 2011; Takashima, 2020b).

Through the project we are presenting here, the pupils will eventually be able to read a rewritten picture book, or in the end, an intact picture book, independently, after familiarizing themselves well with simple vocabulary and expressions and practicing reading in pairs and in trios cooperatively. Project-based learning is said to be a viable approach to fostering learner autonomy (Legutke & Thomas, 1991). A self-propelled learner is what the Course of Study has always been aiming at in all subjects.

1.4 Using rewritten pictures books

Although we used a Level 1 graded reader with only 100 headwords, the vocabulary was still too difficult for the pupils who study English for only two hours a week. Therefore, it was necessary for the teacher to rewrite the graded reader.

It is worth mentioning here what rewriting involves. It refers to the process of adapting the original text by simplifying vocabulary and structures, so that the content becomes more accessible and comprehensible, which makes the pupils enjoy the story³. We prefer a conversational style, as conversations make clear who is talking to whom, and the sentences inevitably become short and their meanings clear in the context of the drawings.

1.5 Selected Picture Books

We selected one picture book based on our original standards:

- 1) The use of English picture books is repeatedly emphasized in the national curriculum.
- 2) The meanings and the content of the stories in such books can be inferred with the help of their pictures.
- 3) If appropriately chosen, these books are full of simple repetitive words or expressions, which are easy to understand in context, and above all, there is always a focused payoff, such as discipline, fun, surprise, or happiness.
- 4) These books can naturally offer cultural information or knowledge through pictures, even if nothing is expressed in words.
- 5) Reading picture books or listening to them being read aloud is commonplace in daily life, and thus using them is a familiar activity among learners.
- 6) Learners can go back and forth in the story when-

ever they feel like doing so, as the picture book is at hand (Higashino, 2020a).

1.6 Graded Readers

Graded Readers, a series of picture books categorized into different levels based on difficulty, were selected using criteria such as the number of words and the thematic suitability. The number of words varies across levels, with higher levels naturally containing a greater number of words. We chose this story, *The*

Little Red Hen (Arengo, 2011), a Level 1 text with 100 headwords, as it is familiar to some learners and features a significant number of repetitive expressions with a clear payoff.

Table 4 presents the number of headwords and the total word count per book, corresponding to the CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages), a European framework for assessing language proficiency levels.

Table 4 Number of Headwords and the Average Word Count per Book in Graded Readers

Levels	1	2	3	4	5
Headwords	100	150	200	300	400
Average word count	540	700	1130	1550	2675
CEFR		A1		A2	B1

However, the text was found to be still far too extensive for 5th or 6th graders, which necessarily made it necessary to modify or rewrite it to suit the learners' level. We will revisit the standards or criteria for selecting appropriate English picture books later.

2. The Study

2.1 Objective of the Study

The objective of this study is to examine and to present appropriate English texts, which allow elementary school pupils to read collaboratively in pairs or trios, and lastly independently, following a set of standards to rewrite the material.

2.2 Subjects and Methodology of the Study

Pupils selected were from a public elementary school, so the results should be applicable to other pupils in Japan. There were 31 5th graders who participated in the study.

The methodology consists of the following steps:

- (1) Selecting graded readers with an appropriate word count and theme.
- (2) Rewriting the selected picture book to match the pupils' proficiency levels.
- (3) Examining whether the pupils were able to read the texts independently through collaborative effort.

3. Picture Books in Educational Contexts

3.1 English Picture Book Selection Standards (Higashino, 2020a)

The following criteria should be considered when selecting picture books for educational purposes:

- (1) The illustrations should clearly depict the contextual background of the narrative. Situations should be presented in a concrete and explicit manner.
- (2) The linguistic structures should be confined to five word-groups, or grammatical categories, adhering to the syntactic pattern of S+V+O (indirect) + O (direct) (C) + temporal or locational adverbials, for instance: "I gave my boyfriend Valentine's flowers on February 14."
- (3) The text should facilitate learners' comprehension of English rhythmic patterns.
- (4) The storyline should incorporate scenarios that allow for the inference of subsequent events.
- (5) Fundamental expressions should be reiterated throughout the text.

3.2 The Guidelines for Rewriting Picture Books

These are the guidelines we set up for rewriting picture books:

- (1) The contents and stories should be the same as the original ones. Frequently repeated but easy vocabulary should be used.
- (2) Converting English picture book stories into dia-

logue form is better than using narrative scripts, because dialogues are simple, short, natural, and easy to understand with the help of pictures.

In principle, the picture book should be written:

- In a dialogue style.
- With one or two sentences per page.
- With sentences limited to five word-groups.
- With familiar words, or vocabulary easily learned in the lesson.

3.3 Principal SLA Concepts Underlying Rewriting Picture Books

The following are the key Second Language Acquisition (SLA) concepts that underpin our research on rewritten picture books for elementary school pupils.

For the sake of brevity, we summarize as follows:

Larsen-Freeman (2002) emphasizes that the frequency with which certain morphemes appear in native speech may influence the order in which second language learners acquire them.

Vygotsky (1978) asserts that the range of skills that are in the process of development, which learners cannot yet perform alone, can be achieved with the support of a more knowledgeable interlocutor, such as teacher or peer, the range being called the Zone of Proximal Development, ZPD.

Larsen-Freeman (2008) argues that the act of producing the same linguistic form or structure without significant change, namely repetition, and a process in

which language forms or structures are revised and modified over time based on context, experience, and instruction, namely iteration, are crucial in language learning. Repetition is static, while iteration is dynamic and fosters emergent language learning where learners continuously refine and expand their linguistic abilities (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2018).

4. Rewriting a Picture Book and the Lesson

4.1 The Story (*The Little Red Hen*) and Rewriting the Picture Book

We selected *The Little Red Hen*, a Level 1 text with 100 headwords, because it is familiar to some learners and features a significant number of repetitive expressions with a clear payoff.

This story has 4 characters, Little Red Hen and her friends, Cat, Duck and Goose. The Little Red Hen begins collecting the necessary ingredients to bake bread, yet none of the other animals express any interest in assisting her. However, as the bread nears completion, the other animals suddenly show interest. Despite this, the Little Red Hen refuses to share the bread, citing the lack of help she received during the arduous process of preparation and baking.

This picture book consists of 10 scenes, and 9 of them were rewritten in accordance with the guidelines presented in Section 3.2. One of the scenes is presented as an instance of contrast in Figure 5.

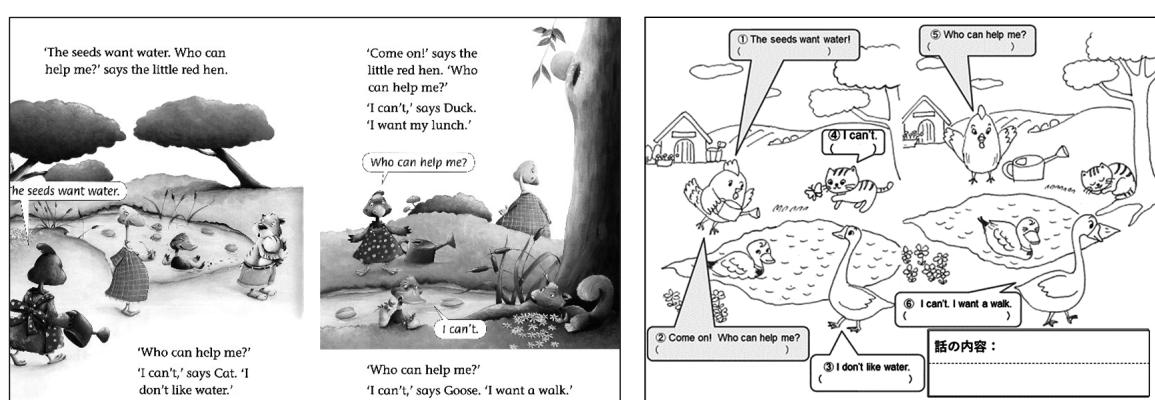


Figure 5 One Comparable Scene from the Original Picture Book (left) and Its Rewritten Version (right)

In the rewritten version, scene directions and descriptions are provided in Japanese to enhance learners' comprehension. Additionally, beneath each conversation, a parenthesized space is included, allowing pupils to write annotations that aid in their under-

standing and/or pronunciation of the English text. Only dialogues such as "Come on! Who can help me?" or "All right." are written on the sheet, although the original English version included both dialogue and accompanying script or stage directions.

4.2 Experimental Lesson

The lesson was conducted as outlined in Table 5.

Table 5 Project: Let's Read a Picture Book in English

Activities	Details
① Let's learn stories from around the World.	Share stories you know and notice similarities or cultural differences.
② Let's review the alphabet.	Review how to read the alphabet and words, recalling the relationship between letters and sounds.
③ Let's review learned expressions.	Review previously learned vocabulary, checking pronunciation and meaning.
④ Let's read a story in English.	Cooperate in groups to read a story rewritten in English.
⑤ Let's present an original story.	Create a continuation of the story and present it.

In ① and ② of Table 5, pupils engage in vocabulary practice and exercises that link letters with pronunciation. In ③, the focus is on learning expressions featured in the story. In ④, pupils read through the rewritten version in pairs or trios. Finally, in ⑤, they create and present the concluding part of the story. The pupils read the rewritten version in pairs or trios.

5. Results

5.1 Reading Skill

Take the fifth scene as an example. In this scene, where the wheat has ripened to a rich golden color, the Little Red Hen suggests to the Goose, Cat, and Duck that they should help her harvest it. This scene is depicted in Figure 6.

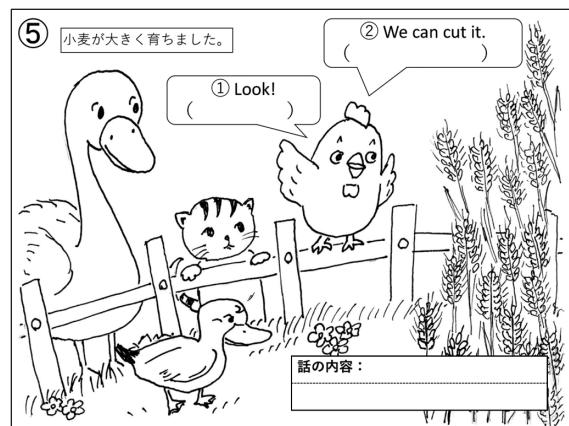


Figure 6 Fifth Scene from *The Little Red Hen* in the Rewritten Version

Some pupils, however, are struggling with how to read "cut" in "We can cut it." Table 6 illustrates three pupils engaging in a discussion and reading English during a class activity.

Table 6 Three Pupils Negotiating to Reach a Correct Understanding of "cut"

A: Look! We can ..., We can ... キュート, クット. 意味から考えると.... (A: Look! We can ... We can ..., cute ..., kutto. Thinking about the meaning)
B: どういう意味なん? (B: What does it mean?)
A: みんなで何かできるってこと。We can ... キュッツ、クット.... でも、クットだ「t」の後に「o」とかないから違う (A: It means we can do something together. We can ... kyuttsu ... kutto But "kutto" doesn't seem right because there's no "o" after "t" in English.)
B: クット クッ (B: Kutto... ku...)
A: クットなんて英語、聞いたことないから変や (A: But "kutto" doesn't seem right, because there's no "o" after "t" in English.)
C: カットじゃないよな? (C: Isn't it "cut"?)
A: カット? カットや 切れてることや。これ(小麦)が育っているってこと。カッや、やっとわかった みんなでカットできるってこと (A: Cut? Oh! "Cut"! It means something is being cut. And this (wheat) is growing So it's "cut"! Now I get it. It means we can all cut together!)
C: カットか (切る動作をしながら) (C: Cut, huh? (While making a cutting gesture))

The interactions among the pupils in Japanese are transcribed. The discussion among the three pupils who figured out how to read “cut” is presented bilin-gually. The three pupils worked together to decipher the pronunciation of “cut” through brainstorming and utilizing their prior knowledge, ultimately arriving at the correct pronunciation and clarifying its meaning within the context.

The process by which the pupils moved from “cute” to “cut” is illustrated in Figure 7. They were struggling to figure out how to read the unfamiliar word “cut” by inferring from their familiar “cute” by a trial-and-error sound association. At the same time, they were figuring it out by a sound-form association circle, i.e. from form, sound and meaning. The pupils ended up arriving at the correct pronunciation, effectively utilizing their prior experiences and situational context through discussion in a trio.

1. Sound Association

cute → cutto → cu → cut

2. Form-Sound-Meaning Circle

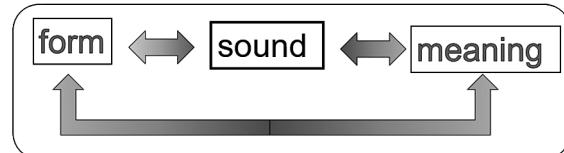


Figure 7 Reaching a Correct Understanding and Reading of “cut” through Collaboration

Figure 8, which is an illustration of what is described in Figure 7, depicts the pupils at the starting point, knowing “cute,” reached their target level, viz. “cut,” through collaborative learning; the development of pupils’ language skills through mutual support within a trio. In the conceptual introduction, the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) was discussed in 3.3. The idea of ZPD is not a novel idea but rather a commonly observed practice in peer learning within the classroom or in teacher-assisted learning, where scaffolding is employed to facilitate learners’ attainment of fluency and accuracy in speech.

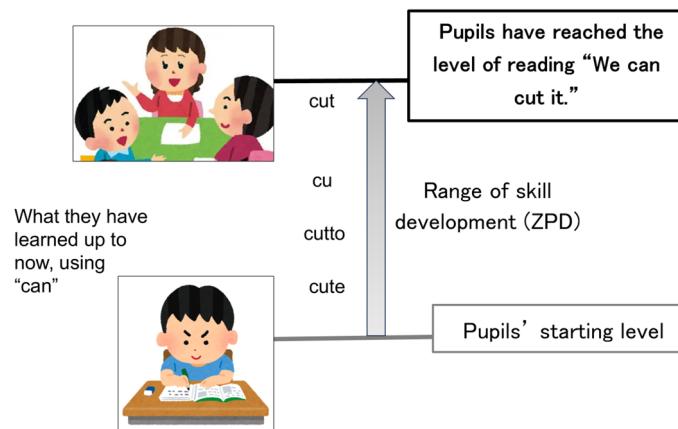


Figure 8 Illustration of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) among Pupils

5.2 Reflections on Each Activity

After the completion of each activity, reflections were conducted using the five formulations listed below.

1. I was able to interact with my friends. (discussion, negotiation)
2. I was able to collaborate in my group activities. (collaboration)
3. I thought about the task. (awareness of the goal)

4. I learned new English words. (learned something new in English)

5. I was able to enjoy the activities. (enjoyment)

The results of the reflections conducted after activities ③, ④, and ⑤ are presented in Table 7. Reflections ③, ④, and ⑤ correspond to the flow of the unit presented in Table 5 and were administered as questionnaires after the implementation of activities ③, ④, and ⑤.

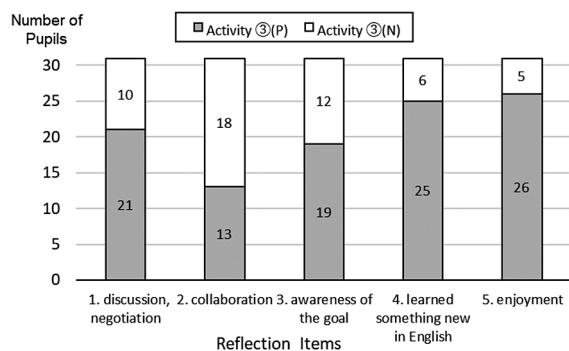
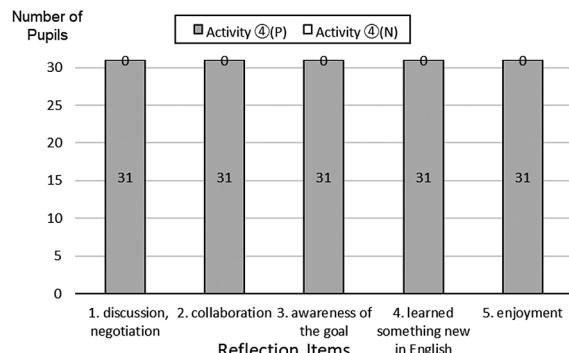
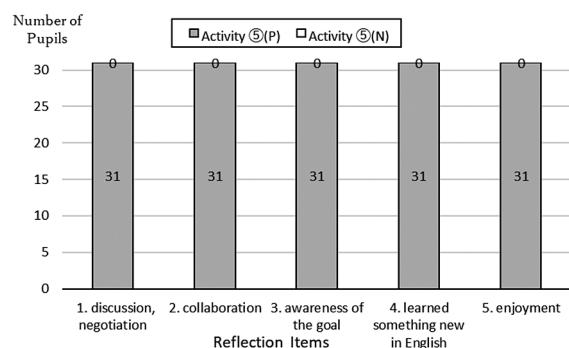
Table 7 Number of Pupils Observed under Each Item in Reflection Sheets after Activities ③④⑤ in the Project: Let's Read a Picture Book in English (N=31)

Four-point Scale	Very Well	Well	Not Very Well	Not at All
Survey Period (Frequency : Number of Students)	Activity ③/④/⑤	Activity ③/④/⑤	Activity ③/④/⑤	Activity ③/④/⑤
Reflection Items				
1. I was able to interact with my friends. (discussion, negotiation)	5 / 21 / 24	16 / 10 / 7	10 / 0 / 0	0 / 0 / 0
2. I was able to collaborate in my group activities. (collaboration)	3 / 27 / 25	10 / 4 / 6	18 / 0 / 0	0 / 0 / 0
3. I thought about the task. (awareness of the goal)	4 / 26 / 27	15 / 5 / 4	12 / 0 / 0	0 / 0 / 0
4. I learned new English words. (learned something new in English)	10 / 25 / 20	15 / 6 / 11	6 / 0 / 0	0 / 0 / 0
5. I was able to enjoy the activities. (enjoyment)	5 / 20 / 21	21 / 11 / 10	5 / 0 / 0	0 / 0 / 0

Table 7 shows the results which indicate the number of pupils observed under each item after each session, ③, ④, ⑤, with each item measured by degrees of correspondence on a four-point scale, Very Well, Well, Not Very Well, Not at All. The four-point scale was consolidated into a two-point scale, categorizing responses as either positive or negative, based on the learners' replies. This adjustment was made to highlight the overall trend in the five surveyed items⁴. The data are presented in graphs form in Figures 9, 10 and 11.

In Figures 9, 10, and 11 the grey bars represent the number of learners who provided positive responses (as depicted by P), while the white bars indicate the number of those who provided negative responses (as depicted by N) for each of the five items following the three different activities. After Activity ③, some pupils exhibited negative attitudes. We should keep in mind that "negative feedback" from the pupils gives teachers a very good chance to look back on the activities, and to modify the methodology or the content of the lesson. In this case, what the pupils did in the activities, time for Activity ③, was solely devoted to preparations for reading a new picture book; they practiced the pronunciation of new vocabulary and listened to the teacher read expressions they needed to become familiar with. These exercises may have caused the pupils to feel some difficulties and may have felt like passive learning, which was reflected in their relatively negative attitudes. However, all of them shifted to positive attitudes after Activities ④ and ⑤. The results suggest that the learners' attitudes toward the implemented methodology were uniformly positive.

Why did motivation remain high in two activities,

**Figure 9** Results of Pupils' Reflections after Activity ③ (N=31)**Figure 10** Results of Pupils' Reflections after Activity ④ (N=31)**Figure 11** Results of Pupils' Reflections after Activity ⑤ (N=31)

④ and ⑤? In Activity ④, the pupils collaboratively thought about and read the story, engaging in trial and error until they were ultimately able to read it. In Activity ⑤, they created and presented their own ending to the story. It can be inferred that these self-directed and proactive activities contributed to their high levels of motivation. This favorable phenomenon must be due to their satisfactory accomplishment, viz. being able to read it on their own. Furthermore, a follow-up activity, making up an original ending, gave them creative freedom, allowing them to think based on their understanding of the story.

One group wrote the same ending as the original story, but others came up with different endings. The first group followed the original story, in which the Little Red Hen says, "Off you go! Go away and play!" And she eats all the bread. The second group changed the story so that the Little Red Hen says, "OK! Let's eat together, but only this time!" And they eat all the bread. The third group followed the original, in which the Little Red Hen says, "No, no way!" But then they added that the Cat asks her one more time, crying. The gentle Little Red Hen then lets her friends eat together. The fourth group changed the story so that the Little Red Hen says, "OK! If you work with me from now on, I will let you eat." They all enjoy eating together.

6. Conclusions

6.1 Discussions

The whole unit is a form of project learning with the same goal for all pupils, namely, reading the book by themselves. The pupils know what they have covered, where they are, and what lies ahead of them in the process of reaching the goal. They see their own progress individually or in pairs or trios. Most pupils reach the threshold of reading English independently. This helps maintain motivation to learn, and motivation, in turn, helps overcome any difficulties in reading.

Thus, the conclusion drawn is that picture books, when appropriately modified or rewritten, can serve as highly effective teaching materials, providing substantial comprehensible input. Furthermore, pupils can engage with these materials either individually or in pairs or trios.

It is worth noting, although further verification is required, that learners who utilize such materials are likely to read more and improve their use of English to a greater extent than they would with other materials.

One of the characteristics of the picture book we used is "repetitive uses of the same phrase, such as "Who can help me?". In our study, it is not simply repeated by the same character, the hen in the story, but in different contexts, so it is actually iteration, not just repetition. Repetition and iteration synergistically contribute to understanding a picture book, even if it is a new one.

Motivation is the key to learning, and motivating learning will enhance learners' self-learning, or lead to success in any activity. However, sustained motivation may be even more important across all areas of endeavor.

6.2 Future Research

In this study, a story was rewritten, and a preparatory lesson was conducted collectively to align with the story. The pupils were encouraged to read the story independently by discussing it in pairs or trios. Moving forward, it is necessary to prepare a greater variety of such teaching materials, allowing pupils to select and read stories on their own. Additionally, it will be important to prepare stories that correspond to each unit in the textbook, ensuring that the stories can be read in accordance with the specific learning objectives of each unit.

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Notes

1. There are quite a few studies which deal with graded readers in English used by high school students and adults (see, e.g., Nation and Yamamoto, 2012; Kara, 2019) as well as the benefits of bringing up children through reading picture books (Eccleshare, 2009; Saito, 2022). It should be noted, however, there are a number of books on using rewritten teaching materials in Japanese for foreigners at the elementary school level (e.g., Mitsumoto and Okamoto, 2006).
2. In the National Assessment of Academic Ability and Learning Situation conducted by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), the number of sixth-grade elementary school students who responded that they liked

learning (or studying) English has declined. In fiscal year 2013, the combined percentage of those who answered, "I don't think so" and "I don't really think so" was 23.7%, but by fiscal year 2021, it had increased to 31.5%. One of the factors cited is the acceleration of junior high school-level content, including tests and evaluations, being introduced earlier (*Asahi Shinbun EduA*, 2023). This issue of polarization at the junior high, and even at the elementary school level, was already pointed out in Taiwan in 2012, where English education was introduced prior to 2011 (*United Evening News*, 2012).

3. Rewriting is different from adaptation in that rewriting is the process of rephrasing or restructuring an existing text to enhance reading with regards to vocabulary and grammar, while adaptation involves modifying a text or a story so that it serves a different purpose, for example to suit a new situation or audience.
4. Note that "motivation" in this paper is used as a cover term for five combined items.

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