

14. Comprehensive Study on the Formation Process of Lifelong Reading Literacy

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(1) Purpose and Aim of Study

Reduced contact with the printed word in recent years is believed to be the cause of lower verbal ability across all generations. Results of studies conducted by researchers in language education indicate that reduced contact with the printed word among younger generations reflects the fact that parents and teachers themselves are not reading books. The purpose of this study is (a) to conduct empirical studies to identify changes in reading habits and reading ability in all generations ranging from children to the elderly, (b) to collect information on education programs for reading ability development in use throughout the world for a comparative study of reading education programs in Japan and the world, (c) to propose practical programs that can be used as model programs for future use in school education, social education, and home education, and (d) to identify theoretical and policy-related education issues that pertain to developing “lifelong reading literacy.”

(2) Outline of Research Results

- The following questionnaire surveys on reading habits and reading ability were conducted: Internet-based survey of university students (about 1,000 students) conducted in fiscal 2004; and, surveys of elementary and lower secondary school students (about 1,500 and 800 students, respectively) in fiscal 2005. Principal questions pertained to (a) reading habits, (b) reading ability (ability to empathize), (c) personal factors (reader’s interests and concerns), and (d) external factors (influence of parents and friends, use of libraries and bookstores, availability of reading time). In fiscal 2006, an Internet-based survey of adults was conducted.

- As a case study of Japan, interview surveys will be conducted with representatives of Hon no Gakko (*Buch Schule*); Bookstart; efforts to promote morning reading groups at schools; reading communities; patients' libraries and music libraries at hospitals; and childrearing support libraries.

- As an international case study, interviews were conducted on reading education and information collected on programs in the following: United States (International Reading Association), France (representatives of library activities), Northern Europe (Sweden and Finland), Asia (China), and North America (Canada).

- Details of the above studies will be made available in the final report. The principal findings of the school education surveys are as follows.
 - Children read less as they move up in school.
 - The influence of television and movies increases as children move up in school.
 - A clear polarity emerges between those who are in the habit of reading and those who are not.
 - Elementary school children read books recommended by parents. Lower secondary school students are more likely to read books recommended by friends than by parents.
 - Lower secondary school students tend increasingly to read magazines and show a preference for science fiction and fantasy.
 - Interesting and inspiring books are read.
 - Fantasy heightens empathy, and magazines heighten stress.
 - Among elementary school children, the ability to understand feelings and emotions declines the more time is spent on video games.
 - Stress levels increase the more time is spent on the telephone.
 - Among lower secondary school students, mature thinking increases as more time is spent reading newspapers.
 - Among male lower secondary school students, the ability to understand feelings and emotions declines the more time is spent on the Internet.
 - Among female lower secondary school students, the general ability to empathize increases as more time is spent watching videos and DVDs.