

## Attitudes from Single Parents and Children Toward an EFL Co-Learning Program in Taiwan Through Picture Storybooks

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**Abstract:** As the importance of parent-child relationship is getting attention nowadays, co-learning activities facilitating parent-child interactions are being encouraged and promoted worldwide. With low birth rates but high teenage crime rates in Taiwan in recent years, family education and parenthood responsibility are increasingly called for, especially for single parents with young children. Therefore, the study attempted to examine parents' and children's attitudes toward an EFL parent-child co-learning program through children's picture storybooks. Twenty participants, including eight single parents and twelve G1 and G2 children, participated in a ten-week co-learning program at a private primary school in Taiwan from mid-April 2018 to mid-June 2018. Parents' and children's surveys as well as interviews for parents were employed for data collection and analysis.

The findings showed that both parents and children were positive about the process of the co-learning program in general. However, the parents responded that they favored participations with their child in the co-learning to the activities alone, while the children preferred the other way around. Recommendations were made for teachers, parents, and educational authorities.

**Keywords:** Parent-Child co-learning, Picture storybooks.

### 1 INTRODUCTION

For more than twenty years, reading literacy has been advocated worldwide in various ways. As early as in 1995, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has selected April 23<sup>rd</sup> as World Book Day to promote reading and publishing. The authorities concerned in Taiwan designated the year 2000 as the Children Reading Year and April 2<sup>nd</sup> as the Children Reading Day (Yang, 2000) while the government has carried out national reading activity projects, one of which was the parent-child co-reading program.

Indeed, reading literacy will be enhanced if conducted by family as a unit (Morrow, Tracey, & Maxwell, 1995) since children imitate and pick up the habits from their parents naturally. The U.S. Secretary of Education once stated that even the best classroom could not compensate for the loss of the family ignorance of learning if parents are not responsible for educating the young. Also, the U.S. former President, Bill Clinton, addressed that education was every citizen's most precious possession, and expected that parents and children should have time not only to work, but to read and play together. In Japan, parent-child co-reading has been engaged for more than four decades while the parents are asked to spend at least twenty minutes a day reading with their children. The similar situation happens in England as well, where parents are encouraged to read with their kids or even to take notes as feedback for school (Song, 2002). Regardless of co-reading in Taiwan or abroad, it has again aroused the attention of the government and the society.

In addition, the birth rates in Taiwan have been declining from 8.35‰ in 2014 to 7.66‰ in 2018

(Ministry of the Interior statistics, 2019) while the teenage crime rates, including juvenile and adolescent, have been on the rise from 6.95% in 2014 to 8.01% in 2018 (National Police Agency statistics, 2019). The force of change in social network has also acted on family structure. More simply put, family bonds are less connected by family members as they used to be. With decreasing number of children per family each year, family education and parenthood responsibility are increasingly called for, especially for single parents with younger children.

### 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1 Shared Reading

One of the ways for teachers or parents to read to children is called shared reading, using a big book for both sides to see the pictures and words on it. During shared reading in the classroom, a big book is often utilized for visual input, so are Powerpoint slides. Discussions in shared reading are usually meant for problem-solving and reading strategies. Questions stimulating thinking may occur during discussions, in which different views of a text are all welcomed; therefore, questioning skills are important. Nursery rhymes and recurring sentences in a big book are often picked out as repetitive practice, followed by independent reading in the end (Rasinski & Hoffman, 2003). Shared reading has also been proved effective on young children with learning difficulties. For example, Chen (2006) applied shared reading to 14 students with reading disabilities from an elementary school and reported positive feedback on the instruction. They found it beneficial to lexicon learning and even writing skills, which could be strengthened through picture writing.

### 2.2 Parent-Child Co-Learning

Foreign studies regarding parent-child participation had different results on varied aspects, from academic performance, learning behavior, to parent-child relationship. Wagner and Spratt (1988) studied a sample of 350 six-to-seven-year-old African children and their parents for five years. Conclusions were drawn that parents who believed in family learning could strongly predict children's learning attitudes and achievement. Junaidy and Nagai (2015) investigated patterns of parent-child interactions in co-creative learning in Indonesia and Japan. The findings indicated that overindulging in role-taking behavior (i.e., parents taking over a task for their child) and intense interaction led to collectivity that was less productive to originality. On a whole, most work from previous literature (Antonucci, 2005; Greenwood & Hickman, 1991) has lent credence to the idea that parents' involvement in children's learning was helpful in the co-learning atmosphere.

Taiwan has also paid attention and showed interest in this area of research for more than twenty years, as found in extensive studies on different ages, stages, and types of children and parents in various subjects and content areas (Shou, 1995; Wang, 2005; Chang, 2010; Cheng, 2013; Lin, 2017), while there has been noticeable scarcity of research projects dealing with co-learning from single-parent families (Liu, 2002; Hu, 2011; Hsiao, 2014).

Based on the research gap mentioned above, it is the intent of the study to examine the participants' responses to the overall process of co-learning practices, followed by a comparison and contrast of single parents' attitude with children's as for certain parts of the program.

### 3 METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Participants

Twenty participants, consisting of eight single parents (4 females, 4 males) and twelve children (6 females, 6 males), participated in a co-learning program at a private primary school in New Taipei City, Taiwan. The parents were working single moms and dads with Bachelor's (BA, N=5) or Master's (MA, N=3) degree, ranging in age from 30 to 40 years ( $M=37.8$  years). The children were either first (G1, N=6) or second (G2, N=6) graders from two classes of the same English teacher, Ms. Huang, MA of TESOL in Taiwan with five-year teaching experience of children English. The program was initiated and organized from January 2018 by the parents' association of the school for single families as the first priority. The participants agreed to spare Wednesday afternoons for

ten weeks at the convenience of the parents, the English teacher, and the researcher. Background information of the parents and children is presented in Table 1 below:

Table 1 Parents' and Children's Background Information

Pair	Participants	Genders	Age	Education	Occupations			
1.	Cherry (C)	female	8	G2	students			
	Rita (R)		7	G1				
	C & R's mom		35	BA		Trade		
2.	Peter (P)	male	7	G1	students			
	Mike (M)		40	MA		Real estate		
	P & M's dad							
3.	Kyle (K)	male	8	G2	students			
	Sophia (S)	female	7	G1				
	K & S's mom		37	BA		Nursing		
4.	Doris (D)	female	8	G2	students			
	Andy (A)	male				38	BA	Freelance
	D & A's dad							
5.	Elsa (E)	female	8	G2	student			
	E's mom		36	MA	Publishing			
6.	Jimmy (J)	male	8	G2	student			
	J's mom	female	39	BA	Tourism			
7.	Brenda (B)	female	7	G1	student			
	B's dad	male	36	MA	Education			
8.	Zeno (Z)	male	7	G1	student			
	Z's dad		41	BA	Hospitality			

#### 3.2 PICTURE STORYBOOKS

Eight picture storybooks were selected and validated by two professors at a university and an elementary-school English teacher based on availability, topics, and level of difficulty. Award-winning books and those highly rated by experts were also taken into consideration. The pictures take up more space than words do on each page of the books selected, with a maximum of forty pages in total. In general, the books were published between 1994 and 2018, with subjects covering parent-child relations, siblings, humans vs. nature, and humans vs. animals. Information of the books selected is listed in order of difficulty levels in Table 2 as follows:

Table 2 Information of the Books Selected

Title	Author(s)	Illustrator(s)	Publisher / Year	Subject(s)	Date of Use
<i>Handa's Surprise</i>	Eileen Browne		Scholastic / 1994	Humans vs. Nature	April 18 <sup>th</sup> , 2018
<i>Penguin</i>	Polly Dunbar		Walker Books / 2007	Humans vs. Animal	April 25 <sup>th</sup> , 2018
<i>Za-za's Baby Brother</i>	Lucy Cousins		Walker Books / 1995	Parents vs. Children	May 2 <sup>nd</sup> , 2018
<i>The Strongest Mom</i>	Nicola Kent		Macmillan / 2018	Mother vs. Child	May 9 <sup>th</sup> , 2018
<i>Some Dogs Do</i>	Jez Alborough		Candlewick / 2003	Parents vs. Child	May 16 <sup>th</sup> , 2018
<i>Owl Babies</i>	Martin Waddell	Patrick Benson	Candlewick / 2002	Siblings	May 23 <sup>rd</sup> , 2018
<i>Cowboy Baby</i>	Sue Heap		Sandvik / 1997	Father vs. Child	May 30 <sup>th</sup> , 2018
<i>Gorilla</i>	Anthony Browne		Walker Books / 2013	Father vs. Child	June 6 <sup>th</sup> , 2018

#### 3.3 COURSE DESIGN

The ten-week co-learning program was conducted from April 11<sup>th</sup> to June 13<sup>th</sup> 2018, ninety minutes for each class per week. The first week was introduction and preparation for the program, including confirmation of package of the books purchased

earlier for each pair of parent and child/ren. Co-reading in class was engaged from the second to the ninth week. The participants were requested to watch videos of the stories before class; nevertheless, their English teacher still guided them through the stories during the co-learning course, including warm-up, shared reading, discussions, and follow-up worksheet exercise.

### 3.4 Survey and Interview

The survey was administered to the participants in the last week of the program. The questionnaire was designed based on the five-point Likert Scale and comprised of three sections: parents' and children's perceptions of, attitudes toward, and suggestions for the co-learning program. Descriptive statistics including frequency, percentage, means and standard deviations was processed for data analysis; only findings of the participants' attitudes toward the program were discussed in the study to examine any similarities or differences between the both sides.

Since survey questionnaires were not the only option available in studies measuring respondents' attitudes or opinions. Interview based on open-ended questions can also be considered informative. The focus group interview was employed to the parents to elicit more in-depth and holistic information about their feedback on the program. Again, only salient excerpts of the informants' thoughts were illustrated and discussed as examples. Responses from the single parents were significant to the study since little attention has been paid to single parents in Taiwan from earlier research. The records of survey and interview were afterwards coded and presented as abbreviations in accordance with data types, dates, and initials of the participants' English names. Examples of abbreviations used for data analysis are given in Table 3:

Table 3 Abbreviations Used for Data Analysis

Abbreviations	Meaning
s180616 K	survey of Kyle on June 16 <sup>th</sup> , 2018
i180616 E's mom	interview of Elsa's mom on June 16 <sup>th</sup> , 2018

## 4 Results and Implications

### 4.1 Parents' Attitudes Toward Co-Learning Program

Table 4 presents the frequencies, percentage, means, and standard deviations of the parents' responses to the question items below. Over half of the parents strongly agreed that they enjoyed being with their kid(s) in pre-class video watching (62.5%) and shared reading and doing worksheets (75.0%) more than the activity itself (25.0% & 37.5%). The more likely explanation may

lie in the possibility that they cherished the quality time with their kid(s) as it takes more time for single parents to take care of a family, with little time left for their child. Excerpts of some parents' thoughts from the interview below also tell how being with kid(s) matters with them:

*Being able to stay with my girls means everything, you know.* (i180616 C&R's mom)

*As a single parent, I'm so happy to watch my son learn in class.* (i180616 Z's dad)

*The program is more like three-way learning: parents, kids, and teachers.* (i180616 J's mom)

Table 4 Parents' Attitudes Toward Co-Learning Program (N=8)

Frequency & Percentage (%)	SA (5 points)	A (4 points)	N (3 points)	D (2 points)	SD (1 point)	Mean	SD
1. I like pre-class video watching.	2 (25.0%)	2 (25.0%)	4 (50.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	3.750	.886
2. I like pre-class video watching with my kid(s).	5 (62.5%)	2 (25.0%)	1 (12.5%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	4.500	.756
3. I like shared reading and doing worksheets.	3 (37.5%)	4 (50.0%)	1 (12.5%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	4.250	.707
4. I like shared reading and doing worksheets with my kid(s).	6 (75.0%)	1 (12.5%)	1 (12.5%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	4.625	.744
5. I feel interested in the co-learning program.	2 (25.0%)	4 (50.0%)	2 (25.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	4.000	.756

### 4.2 Children's Attitudes Toward Co-Learning Program

The results in Table 5 indicated that the children's attitudes were counter to their parents'.

While at least one-third of them showed strong agreement with pre-class video watching (33.3%) and shared reading and doing worksheets (58.3%), the number of responses for strongly agree declined when it came to being with their parents in video watching (16.7%) as well as reading and doing worksheets (25.0%). These findings may account in part for the child's stage as in grade school, the time they are ready to learn to solve problems independently and might feel the pressure from doing problem-solving activities with their mom or dad aside.

Table 5 Children's Attitudes Toward Co-Learning Program (N=12)

Frequency & Percentage (%)	SA (5 points)	A (4 points)	N (3 points)	D (2 points)	SD (1 point)	Mean	SD
1. I like pre-class video watching.	4 (33.3%)	3 (25.0%)	2 (16.7%)	2 (16.7%)	1 (8.3%)	3.583	1.379
2. I like pre-class video watching with Mom/Dad.	2 (16.7%)	2 (16.7%)	6 (50.0%)	1 (8.3%)	1 (8.3%)	3.250	1.138
3. I like shared reading and doing worksheets.	7 (58.3%)	3 (25.0%)	2 (16.7%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	4.417	.793
4. I like shared reading and doing worksheets with Mom/Dad.	3 (25.0%)	5 (41.7%)	3 (25.0%)	1 (8.3%)	0 (0.0%)	3.833	.937
5. I feel interested in the co-learning program.	6 (50.0%)	3 (25.0%)	2 (16.7%)	1 (8.3%)	0 (0.0%)	4.167	1.030

### 5 Conclusions and Recommendations:

In conclusion, the present study is preliminary research on single parents' and children's thoughts about the co-learning program. A major result is that parents' attitudes were not consistent with their children's all the way through. To people's common impression, single parents may put too much focus on

work and too little on their child, whereas the findings here could provide some empirical evidence to clarify the myth. However, as still in the experimental stage, much more has to be done due to the limitations of its small sample size and restricted time for the program. Further research is therefore warranted in different co-learning contexts.

Recommendations are made for parents, teachers, and educational authorities. Parents, single or not, are advised to have patience and give time for child's own learning pace even if little progress or trial and error are least expected in the process. Teachers are recommended to design co-learning activities for parent-child interactions while a variety of tasks should be adapted for a multi-levelled class. Educational authorities are suggested to budget for facilities or materials for co-learning at places off campus like libraries and museums to benefit more families.

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