

The Effects of Picture-Book Shared Reading Training for Immigrant Mothers of Young Children: An Exploratory Study

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Abstract

This study examined the effects of picture book shared reading training for marriage-immigrant Korean mothers of young children with poor to moderate levels of Korean language skill. The training course offered opportunities for mothers to learn to read Korean picture storybooks and to share these with their children. The course instructor conducted interviews with the mothers, both before the course started and at its end. Observations were made in the Philippine Center in Seongbuk-Gu, Seoul, South Korea. The type of book, the purpose of reading, and desire for child responding required different story reading strategies: Word-by-word reading, adopting voices for characters, adding the reader's interpretation or asking questions of the listener, adapting the story by changing parts of sentences, and reading some parts of the picture book, while omitting others. The course benefited the mothers' story-sharing skills and their parental efficacy beliefs. Korean language teaching materials and their use are discussed, along with implications for governmental inclusion policies for people whose backgrounds are not in Korean culture.

Keywords : Immigrant Mothers of Young Children, Training Course, Picture Storybooks, Story Reading Strategies

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Introduction

A big demographic change in South Korea over the past 15 years is the rapid growth in the number of immigrants. People who have a cultural background that is not Korean are currently 2.8% of the whole population of South Korea, compared to less than 1% in 1997 (MOPAS, 2012; Lee, Choi, & Park, 2009). The number of children under 6 years of age living with a parent whose cultural background is not Korean is now estimated at 104,694, which is 62.1% of the total number of children who have a parent with a non-Korean cultural background.

The countries of origin for the majority of immigrant parents in South Korea are China (immigrant¹ and native), Vietnam, and the Philippines. Interview data collected from Korean language teachers and immigrant mothers indicated that preschool children living in homes with an immigrant mother had low levels of Korean vocabulary and also poor articulation of Korean words, which made their speech difficult to understand (Kim & Shin, 2008). These language difficulties of the young children were thought to arise because their mothers could not provide adequate oral language experiences for them in the Korean language. In the case of school-age children in these homes, maladjustment in peer relationships, poor academic achievement, a high rate of dropping out from school, and a low entry rate for high school and post high school attendance have been reported (Kim, 2006).

Acculturation is the process of cultural and psychological change that results when two cultures meet (Sam & Berry, 2010). Enculturation refers to the process of first-culture learning, while acculturation can be thought of as second-culture learning. Acculturation is affected by both why a person immigrated and the receptivity of the cultural destination (Kramer, 2011). Marriage is the main reason why women from other nations immigrate to and raise their families in South Korea (MOE, 2010).

According to Rudmin (2003), immigrants' acculturation can be grouped into four categories: Integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization. These categories indicate each immigrant's answer to two questions: (1) Is it of value to maintain one's identity and characteristics? and (2) Is it valuable to develop relationships with the larger society in the new country?

¹ Originally Korean who immigrated to China around a century ago

Integration refers to a process by which immigrants become a part of the larger society, while also maintaining their culture of origin. Assimilation involves the adoption of the host culture and a rejection of the culture of the country of origin. Separation occurs when an immigrant affiliates with a community of others from her own country of origin, but does not become a part of the new country majority. Marginalization results when the immigrant does not affiliate with any group—neither a community of immigrants from the same country of origin nor a community of people who are native.

A recent survey conducted by Seo (2012), which included 1,800 married immigrant mothers in Korea with preschool and early school-age children, showed that they were supported by parents-in-law but had very limited social contact with people in their local community. The capacity of these immigrant mothers to raise their children in Korea was low, and they also expressed a low level of satisfaction with the environments in which they were feeding their infants. They also expressed a strong desire to pass on their mother tongue to their children.

Many of these immigrant mothers also indicated that they highly valued the visiting programs designed to support Korean language learning and parenting. These programs are operated by the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family, whose mission is to support homes of immigrants (Seo, Yang, Joe, & Jung, 2011). It seems, then, on the basis of these survey results, that many immigrant mothers of preschool children in Korea are in the process of integration and in need of help in order to accomplish integration both for themselves and for their children. It was envisaged that helping mothers to learn the Korean language would directly help children in this study to become integrated within the Korean culture.

For several reasons, sharing picture storybooks with their young children is a good experience with which immigrant mothers and their children can start. First, because picture books are comprised of both pictorial and written texts, they support the acquisition of new word meanings. Short sentences and repetition of words and sentences in picture books are also welcoming to a beginning reader, such as the immigrant mothers, not intimidating. Furthermore, there is considerable use of onomatopoeia in many picture books for children, which is pleasing to the ear and engages young children, and also helps them become aware of a language's phonology. Mimetic words and onomatopoeia highlight the very sensual

aspect of the Korean language, in which there are levels of consonants and vowels, referring to big or small physical movements (e.g. poongdeong vs. pongdang which corresponds to splash vs. splash in English).

The importance of story and other picture book reading to preschool children's language and knowledge development has been demonstrated in a great deal of research (see Schickedanz & Collins, 2013). Furthermore, both reading by teachers in preschools or day care settings (e.g., Kim & Kim, 2011; van Kleeck, 2006; Wasik, Bond, & Hindman, 2006) and parental reading to children at home have been shown to benefit young children's language development, when teachers or parents receive training on picture book reading strategies (Kim & Kim, 2011; Lim & Cole, 2002). A range of benefits from book reading has also been found for reading to 2-year-olds (Brand & Donato, 2001; Lee, 2006). Finally, the power of stories in books can influence not only a child's cognitive development, but also the child's emotional and moral development (Gadamar, 1975; Schickedanz & Collins, 2013).

But, how can mothers who speak Korean as a second language be encouraged to read picture books in Korean, and how can they be helped to learn how to read to their children? In the study reported here, a picture storybook shared reading course was offered to the immigrant mothers to help them learn how to share stories with their young children.

Story sharing refers to activities in which listeners participate with the reader, and the story is shared through their thinking and imagination (Raines & Isbell, 1994). The interactive process of the reader and the listener helps the latter's emergent literacy. Compared to conventional Korean language lessons, story sharing with picture books seems a good option for immigrant mothers and their children. Moreover, intergenerational literacy programs (i.e., adults learn the new language, in part, by reading picture books to their young children) are common in various countries, such as the USA, and studies show benefits for both parents and children (e.g., Paratore, Krol-Sinclair, Paez, & Bock, 2010).

The study reported here sought to find evidence for the benefits of a specific picture book shared reading program in Korea, which was designed for immigrant mothers and their young children.

Method

Participants

Ten women who had immigrated from the Philippines were the participants in this study. All were enrolled in a course on picture book reading that was designed specifically for them. At the start of the training course, mothers had been living in Korea from 2 years and 1 month to 8 years and 1 month (mean duration = 5 years and 3 months). The educational levels of the mothers were not high, in general, but varied widely from elementary school dropout to university graduate. As judged by the course instructor's observation, the mothers had poor to moderate levels of Korean language skill. (No formal pretest was administered.)

Some mothers brought their children to the training as a convenience; others preferred to come alone for lessons about the reading of Korean picture books. Eight children attended the course regularly. At times when nurseries were closed, more children attended. The regular listeners' ages ranged from 11 months to 6 years and 10 months (mean age = 4 years and 3 months). There was one child each across the ages from naught to 6 years, except two who were 5 years old.

Procedures and Design

Materials and the Picture-Book Shared Reading Course. Two kinds of book were used in the training: (1) general picture storybooks for young children, and (2) picture storybooks based on folk tales of Korea or the Philippines, all written in Korean. The main selection criterion for the general books was playfulness, judged by these aspects: (1) Repetition of a word or a sentence, mimetic words and onomatopoeia in the texts of the picture books, which easily turn to linguistic play because of its rhythmic nature; and reading a word which features a big physical movement that a young reader could easily mimic. (2) A simple but solid story line, which would engage the reader's thinking about story events and the feelings of the characters, and prompt imagining him- or herself as like a character in the story.

The amounts of written text are considerably greater in folk tale picture books, compared to

Table 1. *Course Summary*

No. of Session	Title of Book	Type of Book	Keyword of Story	Key Point of the Session
1	Knock! Knock!	General	Knock, Door, Red, Orange, Blue	Encouraging linguistic and bodily response
2	Golden Axe and Silver Axe	Folk tale	Axe, Gold, Silver, Prize, Honest, Appear	Toy making
3	Good Morning Moon	General	Good Night, Moon, Cat, Dark, Light	Child's participation at repetitive sentences
4	Magic Pond ¹⁾	Folk tale	Liar, honest, forest, pond, poor, rich	Comparison traditional folk tales between Korean and Philippine
5	A Bumpy Train	General	Brittle, Brattle, Train, Spoon, Bottle, Ride	Nuances of big words and small words. Rhythm of sentence
6	Lazy Boy Who Became an Ox	Folk tale	Snooze, fiddle around	Talk about domestic work at home
7	Clonk the Apple	General	Clonk, Bit by bit, Ant, Elephant, Giraffe, Mole	Onomatopoeia, mimetic word
8	Legend of Pineapple ²⁾	Folk tale	Seed, Plant, Grow	Comparison traditional folk tales between Korean and Philippine
9	Strawberry Is Red	General	Strawberry, Banana, Blueberry, Grape, Red, Orange, Blue, Purple	Sing songs with names of fruits
10	What Do We Play Today ³⁾	Folk tale	Be diligent. Work hard	Comparison traditional folk tales between Korean and Philippine

¹⁾Philippine tale about two wood cutters and a fairy²⁾Philippine tale about a girl who became a pineapple³⁾Philippine tale about people who did not work and became monkeys

general picture books. However, fewer pictures and dialogic sentences and more narrative sentences were characteristic of the folk tale picture books had in common. The criterion for selecting folk tale picture books was similarity in the storylines and themes between Korean and Philippine tales. (See Table 1 for titles of all 10 books.) For example, the storyline of *Golden Axe and Silver Axe*, a Korean tale, is very similar to that of *Magic Pond* from the Philippines (i.e., a good person gets a reward by a mystical force at the end, while a greedy one loses everything). The other three folk tales from both countries have a common theme: laziness and its fierce consequences. The course developers thought these similarities would

motivate the mothers to want to tell more about their culture of origin to their children, and would lead young children to compare the traditional folk tales of both cultures.

The training course for this study had 10 sessions, with the first in mid-September and the last early in November 2012. Each course session, which lasted about 45 minutes, consisted of the trainer's modeling of reading one picture book, and the mothers' reading to a child or to one another, in turn, while commenting, questioning, and discussing. Here is a typical scene of the trainer's reading of *Knock! Knock!*, illustrated and written by Anna-Clara Tidholm (1992).

1. Engaging in Exploration of the Cover

"Ah, here is a friend. Who is this?"

"Is it OO?" or "Is it XX?" (calling the names of participants)

"What is he doing here?"

"Do you want to get in?"

2. Encouraging the Listener's Participation

"What do you want me to do?" (in the scene of the closed door)

"Let's knock the door together."

"There is a drum. Do you want to hit it together?"

3. Promoting Book-Related Play

"Yes, this is the rabbits' room. What is this? (pointing to the carrot) It looks delicious. (The trainer pretended to eat the carrot.) Do you want to eat it, too?"

The mothers' book-reading followed the course leader's modeling. The mothers were encouraged to do several specific activities with this book: (1) Greet with mother-tongue Hello by saying "Kumudaka" (at the door opening scene); (2) invite a body participation by questioning, "Who wants to knock on the door this time?"; (3) elicit oral participation with questioning, such as "Whose door is it?"; (4) elicit action play based on the pictures of the book, for example, by remarking, "I want to eat this. Yami!"; and (5) prompt the child to explore the environment and use onomatopoeia, by questioning, such as with "What sound does it make?" (knock the floor)

The instructor also emphasized the importance of gazing in the same place as the baby's eyes focused, and to respond to it (see Brooks & Meltzoff, 2008). For children ages 2 to 3 years, attention was long enough to share a story, taking turns with bodily gestures or verbal sounds prompted by their mothers. It was rare for a child not to respond to a mother's request, such as "Can you do this (a sound or a gesture)?" or a question, such as "What if you do this (a gesture)?" or "What will you say, if I say this (a word or a sound)?" Questions such as "What happened?", "Why did it happen?" and "How did it happen?" were asked of children 4 years of age and older, in the context of folk tale picture books, in particular.

Table 2 summarizes mothers' activities taught by the instructors during the course and lists intended outcomes for children's learning.

Table 2. *Summary of Mothers' Activities and Their Goals During the Course*

Mothers' Activities	Intended Outcome for Children's Learning
Greeting in mother-tongue	Wordings of social exchanges in mother-tongue Social conventions of visiting and welcoming
Bodily participation	Imagination of characters' behaviors Increasing familiarity of reading a book by using a book as a toy
Facial Expressions	Empathy to other's feelings
Pointing to a picture or a word	Learning a vocabulary
Action play	Exposure of higher vocabulary Identifying the reader as a characters in the story
Use of onomatopoeia and mimetic words	Taste of richness of Korean language sound. Developing sensitivity towards levels of Korean alphabets
Asking questions about the story	Reflection on the storyline Making sense of what they heard
Exploration of the environment	Increasing curiosity Application of learning from a book to the real world

Data Collection

All course sessions were recorded by two video cameras. One camera focused on the storyteller, the other on the listener(s). Story-sharing activities during the sessions were analyzed and categorized by two researchers. All the recorded utterances made by the

storytellers were compared to the text of the books. Coding was based on the categories of (1) word-by-word reading, (2) changing tones for characters, (3) interpretations of the text, questioning the listener (e.g., Who did that?), (4) changing parts of sentences, requesting the child's participation (e.g., Do you want to get in?), and (5) reading pictorial text.

Semi-structured interviews with the instructor and each mother were carried out before and after the course. The purpose of the pre-training interview was to find out the mothers' social backgrounds, their experiences of reading to their children, the difficulties of raising their children, and their expectations toward their family and the course. If the mother had never read to her child before, questions were asked to learn about the reasons. The final interview questions were about whether the mothers made improvements in their Korean language learning and story-sharing skills during the training, what difficulties or supports they had from family members for attending the course, and how the course affected their feelings about themselves and their interaction with their children.

Results

This study examined story-sharing skills of immigrant mothers with preschool children within the context of a picture-book reading course. It was obvious that the course had provided multiple happy experiences of communication between the mothers and their children through the medium of picture books. The mothers were highly motivated to learn story sharing skills in the course and improve their speaking of Korean in general. They felt self-efficacy as a parent deeply. It seemed certain that they could pass their own stories and songs on to their children. From the children's point of view, books were very enjoyable and a positive attitude towards books was built. They enjoyed hearing folk tales from their mother's culture, as well as their father's.

Mothers' Story-Sharing Behavior

Various types of story sharing were observed in the mothers' book reading, as well as in the instructor's: (1) Word-by word reading happened with books of words only, which were

useful for helping mothers construct relations between letters and sounds. However, mothers read word-by-word even with books with long sentences after becoming familiar with the story lines after reading the books several times. Mothers sometimes memorized the whole sentences of the books. (2) There was also much changing of voices for characters in the general books, as well as in the books with folk tales. (3) Mothers often added interpretations while reading the picture books based on Philippine folk tales. For example, they talked about the monsoon with the picture of trees and two-story houses in *What Do We Play Today*. They also explained why people had to stay on the first floor rather than on the ground level, and what happens in the rainy season. (4) Mothers also sometimes adapted the story, especially when they read picture books of Philippine folk tales. Instead of paying attention to the written text, they gazed at the listener and told the story. Changes in suffix of a sentence, and change from a narrative sentence to a dialogic one, were two usual forms of adaptations they made in the stories. (5) Sometimes, mothers skipped parts of books when reading to babies. When the baby's hands shook the book, the mother stopped reading and turned the page.

Skipping some lines of written text or even one or two pages did not cause trouble in a child's enjoyment of the reading. When the mother's Korean-speaking skills were very limited, the instructor often read just one or two pages of a picture book, ignoring the rest, or she told the story, without referring to the book's written text, while holding the book open

Table 3. 5 Types of Story Sharing with Picture Books

Type of story sharing skill	Word-by-word	Changing tones with characters	Adding interpretation	Adaptation of story	Skipping
Purpose of reading	To construct Relation between sound and letter	To enhance listener's understanding of story line	To expand audience's interest and spoken language	Aesthetic appreciation	To follow young listener' attention
Point of practice	Korean letter sound	Contrasting voices of good or nasty and young or old people	Highly engaged to characters in story	Good understanding of storyline	Follow listener's eye gaze
Type of Book	Words only. Repeated reading	Nursery Rhymes Folk tales	Long sentences or swear words	Large amount of text	A little story line

for the audience to see the pictures on the pages.

Table 3 shows types of story sharing with picture books according to the purpose of reading and the type of book. The focus of practice for the book and the course session are also described in Table 3.

The mothers' story sharing with children under 2 years was characterized by the observers as mostly child-directed, because they typically spoke in a little high pitch, and used acclamation, slow tempo, pausing, and changes in tone. There were also many rich interactions between the mothers and the children. The mothers were observed frequently to mimic voices or bodily movements, which had been modeled by the instructor before. With older children, the mothers actively employed bodily gestures, facial expressions, mimetic words and onomatopoeia in their mother tongue, as well as in Korean, and they asked questions and provided explanations about their own culture that related to a text or a scene in a storybook.

Mothers' Interview Data

An interview before the training showed that mothers were not sure about passing on their own culture to their children or about their ability to read Korean books to them.

Case 1

I like Korea...Five years...Would be good to speak Korean fluently. The Philippines are poor. When the Philippines are rich, I will teach then (when asked to read books to her daughter). I am not good at reading Korean books. She watches television when she comes back home from nursery at 4 o'clock. She listens to her daddy. (In response to being asked when or whether the husband read to the daughter, the mother said) "He is tired, tired. Comes back home late."

<Maria with a 4-year-old daughter>

Case 2

Korean is difficult (waving hands). (In response to the researcher asking in English "As for your son, what do you expect him to be in the future?", the mother said) "... I'm happy, I think."

<Vanessa with a 3-year-old son>

Interviews after the training showed that the course transformed the mothers' attitudes greatly. They felt more competent in reading Korean picture books and expressed pride in themselves and what they had accomplished.

Case 3

There were always two (pointing to Youngmee) reading books with her daddy. But speak Korean and English, we are three now (laugh). I must do this (reading picture books together). I have to be soft and get well. The feeling (looking at Youngmee) is being very proud.

<Anna with a 6-year-old daughter>

Case 4

(When being asked whether there were changes during the training), this mother said, "Yes, yes. My Korean is much better, now. But I want to read Korean with a little more accuracy. I want to read books to my children's friends. I have a purpose. I can teach English for free. I feel like I want to be of service. As you know English is our 2nd language..."

<Helena with two children>

The mothers' attitudes towards reading to their children changed greatly before and after the course. They showed a lot more confidence in their Korean language reading skills and in interacting with their children. The mothers reported that the children often asked them to read the picture books, which had been introduced previously in the course, and the mothers and the children enjoyed doing this. Mothers also reported that their husbands positively reacted towards their learning of the Korean language and of reading to the children. Before the training, there was even a husband who banned speaking English, since it was considered shameful for him to have a foreign wife at home.

Different Child Behaviors at Different Ages

Major differences observed in the responses of children of different ages mirrored development of children's oral language and social interactions during the second and third years of life. For example, a 20-month-old child observed had difficulty when interacting to pretend knocking on a door. However, it was possible for the 30-month-old children to

pretend to knock on a door and also to open the door as a response, after the mother had modeled it.

It was also observed that 5- and 6-year-olds often looked at the instructor while their mothers were reading to them, as if seeking the instructor's approval of their mothers' activities. The children seemed to notice when their mother did something not quite right or was awkward in the pronunciation of a text or the wordings of a question.

Discussion and Conclusions

Discussions of Results

The support the course offered to immigrant mothers in learning to share picture books with their young children was meaningful in several aspects. Most of all, there was active involvement by all of the participants. The instructor introduced finger toys of characters in the story during the second session. She assured the mothers about their ability to engage their child with the picture books by indicating that story sharing is about the story not just about reading a book. This assurance allowed the mothers' attention to shift from text reading and pronunciation of words to the story itself. The mothers' fear of failure seemed to diminish.

After one or two course sessions, the mothers' attitudes seemed to take a change somewhat to "I can do this" and "I want to do this." Motivation for learning Korean soared when fear of sharing a picture book in a wrong way was gone, and when mothers found they could laugh and find fun in story sharing. Joint-reading by the course instructor and the mothers occurred through questioning and reply with bodily movements or oral responses. The mothers were very eager to learn various skills demonstrated by the instructor, remarking frequently "Yes, yes." Or "Right." Story sharing with picture books increased interactions between the teller and the listeners.

Finally, because the course used traditional folk tales from the countries of both the mothers and the fathers, there were opportunities to compare them. The mothers became competent and proud in their ability to transfer their own culture to their children. Book-related activities were rich because they involved play, toy making, and even creative drama,

after a story had been shared. And last but not least, the course instructor judged that mothers increased their Korean language skills and deepened their understanding of Korean culture.

The sessions utilizing the traditional folk tales tapped the mothers' own stories. The picture books about the lazy people who always played and became monkeys, or a girl becoming a pineapple, showed customs, animals, trees, houses and streets in the Philippines, and climates and weather. The use of the folk tales was consistent of Jobe's (2003) argument that picture books can enhance cultural identity. Even the young children pointed to similarities between traditional folk tales of the two agricultural countries.

A strong and simple message was conveyed through the course program about how to live on earth: "Be diligent." To grow up as a world citizen, Licketeig and Danielson (1995) have argued that it is important to read books emphasizing diversity of cultures and values, to compare diverse cultures and values, to perceive of one's own culture from other vantage points, and to connect and borrow from a great variety of cultural contributions to world culture. Furthermore, children can know about conservation and rediscovery of the traditions of their own culture through books that are shared with them.

Limitations of this study

This study focused on the mothers' responses to the course session offerings and to their practice and skill development in this setting. The mother's actual use of the strategies they learned with their children over a period of time following the course was not studied. In addition, no formal measurement of mothers' baseline or final skill in Korean language use or understanding was used. Therefore, the effectiveness of the course offering cannot be completely known at this time.

A systematic analysis of the effects of training on interactions between the young children and their immigrant mothers will be reported in a subsequent study, and it is hoped that data about the children's language and literacy skills, as a consequence of picture book sharing with their mothers, can also be collected. It would also be of interest to assess each child's views and feelings, at later ages, of their mother's country's culture and the Korean culture, within which they now live, to determine whether they have developed values of appreciating both cultures.

Implications for Policy

Goals and materials of multicultural education have now entered the third generation in Korea. Until the beginning of the new millennium, the government tried to persuade immigrants to accommodate Korean culture and to learn Korean language. The second generation of education was characterized as an increase of knowledge about others. During the middle of the last decade there were movements toward learning the spouse's language by husbands of marriage-immigrants. Big multi-national companies, such as the Hana financial investment cooperation and STX, funded the publication of bilingual books, introducing stories about people and folk tales of other countries, such as Vietnam and the Philippines. But contents of these books had the problem of a low profile for the immigrants' own people. In general, the marriage immigrants were not highly educated.

The third generation started around the year 2010. At this time, Korean publishing companies (e.g., Bolim, Jeong-in and Dagly) started to import picture books, which were already popular in the country of their original publication. Thus, the texts, as written by native speakers, were no longer awkward, and were also of high literary quality. The Daum internet provides a site of folk tales from eight countries. The tales are read in Korean or in the original language by original speakers (see www.ollybolly.org).

The goals of the picture book shared reading course in this study were to: (1) Promote Korean language skills in citizens and mothers living in Korea, and (2) to increase the immigrant mothers' skills to share stories with their children, including tales of the original country. Because many of the female marriage-immigrants are not well educated, they need, as mothers of children still young and not yet experiencing school problems, to have the opportunity to learn Korean and to experience pride about their own culture. We suggest that government policy-makers concerned with the integration of immigrants in Korea put this first.

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