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Parents' Needs for English Picture Storybooks for Shared Reading with Children Aged 6–7 in the Family Environment

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Abstract

English learning for young children requires materials that are appropriate not only for classroom instruction but also for interaction in family settings. This study aimed to identify parents' needs and preferences regarding English picture storybooks for children aged 6–7 and to derive design implications for family-based English literacy materials. A descriptive survey was positioned as the needs-analysis stage of a broader research and development project. Ten parents of children aged 6–7 were represented in the working dataset. Data were organized around parents' difficulties, reading practices, language needs, visual and physical preferences, story themes, and supporting activities. The documented preliminary finding showed that 80% of the parents experienced difficulty finding English books suitable for beginners, practical and economical, and comfortable for parent-child interaction. The simulated item-level analysis further indicated high importance for age-appropriate content, illustrations that support comprehension, simple language, readable text, comfortable shared use, and affordable materials. A6 landscape was the most frequently selected format, while animal, adventure, and everyday-life stories were among the most preferred themes. The findings provide a needs-based foundation for the subsequent development of an A6 English picture-storybook series.

Keywords: parents' needs; English picture storybooks; young learners; shared reading; family literacy

1. Introduction

English learning for young learners requires materials that correspond to children's developmental characteristics and provide opportunities for meaningful language exposure. Children in the early stages of formal education benefit from concrete experiences, repetition, stories, visual support, and engaging interaction. Cameron (2001) and Pinter (2017) emphasize the importance of meaningful activities, stories, repetition, and visual support in language learning for young learners. Lightbown and Spada (2013) likewise describe language development as closely related to the quality and meaningfulness of exposure and interaction. For beginner learners, however, accessibility of input remains essential because language materials that exceed children's linguistic resources can reduce opportunities for comprehension and participation.

Although English instruction is commonly associated with formal school settings, the family is also an important literacy environment. Shared reading allows parents to read aloud, point to illustrations, explain unfamiliar expressions, model pronunciation, ask questions, and connect story content with children's experiences. Joint book reading has long been associated with literacy development (Bus et al., 1995), while more recent evidence suggests that the effects of shared-reading interventions depend on intervention characteristics and study design (Noble et al., 2019). The implication for material development is that the book should facilitate interaction rather than merely deliver a block of English text.

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The family context also creates a practical question: what kind of book can parents realistically use with young children at home? The preliminary needs analysis in the broader research project found that 80% of ten parents experienced difficulties in finding English books that were suitable for beginner learners, practical and economical, and comfortable for parent-child interaction. The report also identified concerns about book size, contextual relevance, and materials that emphasize vocabulary without sufficient meaningful narrative support. These observations indicate that material suitability needs to be examined from both child and parent perspectives.

Picture storybooks are particularly relevant because visual information can provide contextual support when it is directly related to the narrative. Mayer (2021) argues that meaningful combinations of words and relevant visuals can support cognitive processing when information is organized carefully. Research on children's books also shows that book language can contain vocabulary and sentence structures that are richer than ordinary child-directed speech, providing opportunities for language and literacy development (Nation et al., 2022). For young beginner learners, this makes contextualized picture-book language especially relevant, provided that the text is carefully controlled and supported by appropriate illustrations.

The broader research project from which this study is derived uses a research and development approach. Needs analysis is the first stage and is intended to identify parents' needs, constraints, reading habits, preferred themes, and format preferences before story adaptation, illustration and layout development, expert validation, and family trials. The project targets ten English picture-storybook titles in A6 format, with simple text, dominant illustrations, and supporting activities. The present article isolates the needs-analysis component and asks four questions: (1) What difficulties do parents experience when selecting English reading materials for children aged 6–7? (2) What characteristics do parents consider important in English picture storybooks? (3) What preferences do parents have regarding language, visual presentation, physical format, story themes, and supporting activities? and (4) What design implications can be derived from these needs?

2. Method

2.1 Participants

The needs-analysis stage was designed for parents who had children aged 6–7. The broader project specifies ten families as the target for the needs analysis and later limited trial. In this working article, a respondent-level synthetic dataset of ten cases (R01–R10) was used to test the intended descriptive analysis while preserving the documented project finding that eight of ten parents, or 80%, experienced difficulty in finding suitable English books. The simulated participant profile represented seven mothers and three fathers, with five children aged six and five aged seven.

2.2 Instrument and Data Collection

The survey instrument was constructed from the needs-analysis objectives in the broader project. It included questions about respondents' reading practices and previous experience with English books, difficulties in selecting materials, forms of parental support during shared reading, and preferred characteristics of English picture storybooks. Twenty

Likert items used a four-point scale from 1 (not important) to 4 (very important) and represented five dimensions: linguistic accessibility, narrative suitability, visual support, physical practicality, and interactional support. Additional questions asked respondents to select preferred story themes, book orientation, and reading duration. Three open-ended questions were included to capture parents' expectations and suggestions. The structure follows standard survey construction and descriptive analysis principles (de Vaus, 2014).

2.3 Data Analysis

Categorical responses were summarized using frequencies and percentages. Likert items were summarized using mean scores, with higher means indicating greater perceived importance. Item means were also aggregated by the five dimensions to provide a compact profile of parents' needs. Open-ended responses were coded thematically by grouping recurrent ideas concerning language simplicity, visual support, physical practicality, story interest, affordability, and guidance for parents. The analysis was descriptive because the participant group was small and the purpose of the survey was exploratory needs identification rather than population-level estimation.

2.4 Data Verification Note

This manuscript is a working draft based on a synthetic respondent-level dataset. The 80% preliminary finding is documented in the research progress report, whereas the detailed item-level distributions, means, theme frequencies, and format preferences in the tables below are simulated values created to test the article's planned analysis structure. They must be replaced by empirical responses from the ten actual parents before submission or use as research findings.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Result

The documented preliminary finding from the larger project was that 80% of the ten parents experienced difficulties in obtaining English books that were suitable for beginner learners, practical and economical, and comfortable for parent-child interaction. The respondent-level simulation used for this working draft preserves this 8-of-10 pattern and enables more detailed descriptive analysis.

Table 1. Participant profile and home reading background

Characteristic	Category	n	%
Relationship to child	Mother	7	70
Relationship to child	Father	3	30
Child age	6 years	5	50
Child age	7 years	5	50
Previous use of English books	Yes	8	80
Previous use of English books	No	2	20
Shared reading frequency	Daily	2	20
Shared reading frequency	3–6 times/week	3	30
Shared reading frequency	1–2 times/week	4	40
Shared reading frequency	Less than once/week	1	10

The simulated profile suggests that shared reading was already present in most households, although only two respondents reported daily reading. Eight parents had previous experience using English books with their children. This indicates that the issue is not simply whether families read together, but whether the available English materials fit the language level and practical conditions of that activity.

Table 2. Reported difficulties in selecting English reading materials

Difficulty	n	%
Language is too difficult	8	80
Difficult to find beginner-appropriate books	8	80
Price is relatively expensive	7	70
No supporting activities	7	70
Difficult to find books suitable for parent-child reading	7	70
Story is too long	6	60
Physical size is impractical	6	60
Text is too small	5	50
Illustrations provide insufficient support	4	40

Language difficulty and difficulty finding beginner-appropriate books were the most frequently simulated concerns, each reported by eight parents. Price, lack of supporting activities, and difficulty finding books designed for parent-child reading followed at 70%. These results suggest that material suitability is multidimensional: linguistic accessibility, affordability, physical design, and interactional support all contribute to parents' perceptions of suitability.

Table 3. Parents' perceived importance of book-design dimensions

Dimension	Item mean range	Dimension mean
Linguistic accessibility	3.80–3.90	3.88
Narrative suitability	3.70–4.00	3.85
Visual support	3.60–4.00	3.80
Physical practicality	3.50–3.90	3.78
Interactional support	3.50–3.80	3.65

Among the five dimensions, linguistic accessibility obtained the highest simulated dimension mean (M = 3.88), followed by narrative suitability (M = 3.85), visual support (M = 3.80), physical practicality (M = 3.78), and interactional support (M = 3.65). At item level, age-appropriate content and illustrations that support comprehension both received a mean of 4.00. Simple sentences, beginner-appropriate vocabulary, readable text, and comfortable joint use each received a mean of 3.90.

Table 4. Selected preferences for story themes, format, and reading duration

Preference area	Category	n	%
Story theme	Animal stories	8	80
Story theme	Adventure	7	70
Story theme	Everyday life	6	60
Story theme	Moral stories	6	60
Story theme	Nature/environment	5	50
Story theme	Fantasy	5	50
Story theme	Folktales	4	40
Story theme	Culture	3	30
Story theme	Science/information	3	30
Book orientation	A6 landscape	7	70
Book orientation	A6 portrait	2	20

Preference area	Category	n	%
Book orientation	No preference	1	10
Reading duration	Less than 5 minutes	1	10
Reading duration	5–10 minutes	6	60
Reading duration	10–15 minutes	3	30
Reading duration	More than 15 minutes	0	0

Animal stories, adventure, everyday-life stories, and moral stories were the most frequently selected themes in the simulation. A6 landscape was selected by seven of the ten respondents, while six respondents preferred a reading duration of 5–10 minutes. These preferences point toward short, visually supported books that can be used within ordinary family routines rather than long-form reading sessions.

Open-ended responses in the simulated coding produced six recurring themes: simple language (8 respondents), illustrations that support understanding (7), affordable materials (7), practical book size (6), interesting stories (6), and guidance for parents (5). The convergence between the quantitative and qualitative patterns strengthens the interpretation that parents' needs concern both the content of the book and the conditions under which the book is used.

3.2 Discussion

The results indicate that parents' needs extend beyond the linguistic difficulty of English texts. High importance ratings for simple sentences, beginner-appropriate vocabulary, and readable text are consistent with the broader project's focus on simple English and low narrative density. At the same time, the strong rating for age appropriateness indicates that simplification should be tied to children's developmental needs rather than achieved through indiscriminate reduction of content. Cameron (2001) and Pinter (2017) both emphasize that young learner materials should be meaningful and developmentally appropriate.

The findings also support the use of picture storybooks as contextualized language-learning materials. Illustrations that support comprehension received the highest simulated item mean, and this aligns with the project's use of relevant visual support as a design principle (Mayer, 2021). The internal development review further identified the need to control character consistency, positioning, perspective, and page-to-page continuity so that illustrations remain functionally related to the narrative. The use of illustrations should therefore be understood as part of the comprehension architecture of the book rather than as decoration.

The emphasis on narrative suitability is also noteworthy. Although the project initially targeted a maximum of 200 words per book, the development process found that strict word-count limits could make some stories feel rushed. The team therefore considered dividing a narrative into a series, shortening text per page, or selecting a complete story segment that could stand independently. This finding is compatible with the broader view that children encounter richer and more complex language in books than in ordinary conversation (Nation et al., 2022). The design challenge is therefore not simply to make a text short, but to make it accessible while preserving meaningful narrative structure.

Physical practicality emerged as another important component. The simulated responses favored a compact format and comfortable joint use, supporting the project's choice of A6. The development report describes A6 as compact and relatively economical while

allowing the book to be held close by parent and child. For family literacy, this physical characteristic matters because reading is often embedded in informal routines rather than conducted at a dedicated study desk. The format must consequently balance portability with readability.

The interactional dimension received the lowest mean among the five dimensions, but it remained clearly important. This may reflect the fact that parents primarily perceive the book first as a reading material, while interactional support functions as an additional affordance. Nevertheless, shared reading research indicates that the interaction surrounding a book can be an important mechanism through which language opportunities are created (Bus et al., 1995; Noble et al., 2019). Vocabulary prompts, simple comprehension questions, and post-reading activities can therefore make the book easier for parents to mediate without turning the reading session into a formal lesson.

Taken together, the findings suggest five needs-based design requirements: linguistic accessibility, narrative coherence, visual support, physical practicality, and interactional support. This interpretation is consistent with the larger R&D project, in which ten candidate titles were mapped and six had already reached A6 booklet-layout stage. The completed prototypes include varied themes and visual styles but share common standards of readable text, sufficient white space, consistent page numbering, contextual activities, and efficient printing.

Table 5. Needs-based design requirements derived from the survey

Identified need	Implication for book development
Linguistic accessibility	Use simple sentences, beginner-appropriate vocabulary, readable text, and controlled text density.
Narrative coherence	Maintain a clear beginning-to-end sequence while avoiding excessive compression of the story.
Visual support	Use contextual illustrations that directly clarify actions, settings, characters, and emotions.
Physical practicality	Use a compact, comfortable, and relatively economical format such as A6.
Interactional support	Provide manageable vocabulary, comprehension prompts, and post-reading activities that can encourage parent-child conversation.

The table summarizes how needs analysis can function as a bridge between user evidence and design decisions. Rather than treating the survey as a descriptive appendix, the needs profile becomes a set of operational requirements for subsequent material development and validation. This is consistent with the design-and-development orientation of the broader project (Richey & Klein, 2007; McKenney & Reeves, 2019).

The survey also provides an important basis for subsequent evaluation. The broader project has prepared parent-response and child-observation instruments that assess ease of use, physical comfort, readability, story comprehension, visual support, child engagement, and willingness to use additional titles. These later measures should be treated as validation of the initial needs assumptions rather than as substitutes for the needs analysis itself.

4. Conclusion

The needs-analysis survey provides a focused empirical basis for designing English picture storybooks for shared reading with children aged 6–7. The documented preliminary finding shows that 80% of the ten parents experienced difficulties in finding suitable English books, while the respondent-level simulation indicates that parents particularly value age-

appropriate content, comprehension-supporting illustrations, simple language, readable text, physical practicality, and affordability. Animal, adventure, everyday-life, and moral stories were among the more frequently preferred themes, and A6 landscape was the most frequently selected physical format in the simulated responses. Overall, the findings support a multidimensional view of material suitability in which linguistic, narrative, visual, physical, and interactional characteristics need to be considered together. The broader R&D project can use these needs as design requirements for subsequent prototype validation and family trials. Because the item-level data in this working manuscript are synthetic, the detailed statistics must be replaced with actual survey responses before the article is submitted or cited as empirical evidence.

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