

Promoting the Understanding of Islam with a Picture Book

1. Reason and Purpose of the Research

Because of the increase of the Muslim population in recent years, it has become essential to coexist with Muslims and to have correct understanding about Islamic people. However, frequently occurring acts of terrorism by IS and similar incidents tend to give a bad image for people from Islamic nations. Therefore, it is very important to educate people to have the correct knowledge about Muslims from when they are young so they grow up without having prejudice toward Islamic nations and people. That is why we came up with the idea of teaching about Islam to young children.

2. Method of Research

First, in general, picture books are said to be influential to children. In the article, “Theory of Picture Books and Children’s Character-building: Impossibility and Possibility in the Encounters with Others,” it is stated that picture books enrich daily life and reading them is a generally accepted practice of childcare. This motivated us to use a picture book as a way to teach about Islam to among children.

- 1) To deepen the knowledge about Islam, we consulted written materials about Islam and the assignment research in last year, “Looking at IS through Media,” and we visited the National Museum of Ethnology and the Kobe Muslim Mosque before making our picture book.
- 2) To research what kind of perceptions people have toward Islam, we requested people to fill out our questionnaire at the Culture Festival at Toyonaka High School. We also consulted an awareness survey that was conducted in Gifu City.
- 3) To learn whether our picture book was delivering the correct information about Muslims from a Muslim point of view, we requested Islamic people at Ibaraki Mosque and Muslim high school students in Indonesia to read the book.
- 4) To investigate whether we could deliver the correct information about Islam with a picture book, we asked first year students of Toyonaka High School and 5



Figure 1. Cover of the picture book we created

elementary school students to read the picture book and then gave a quiz.

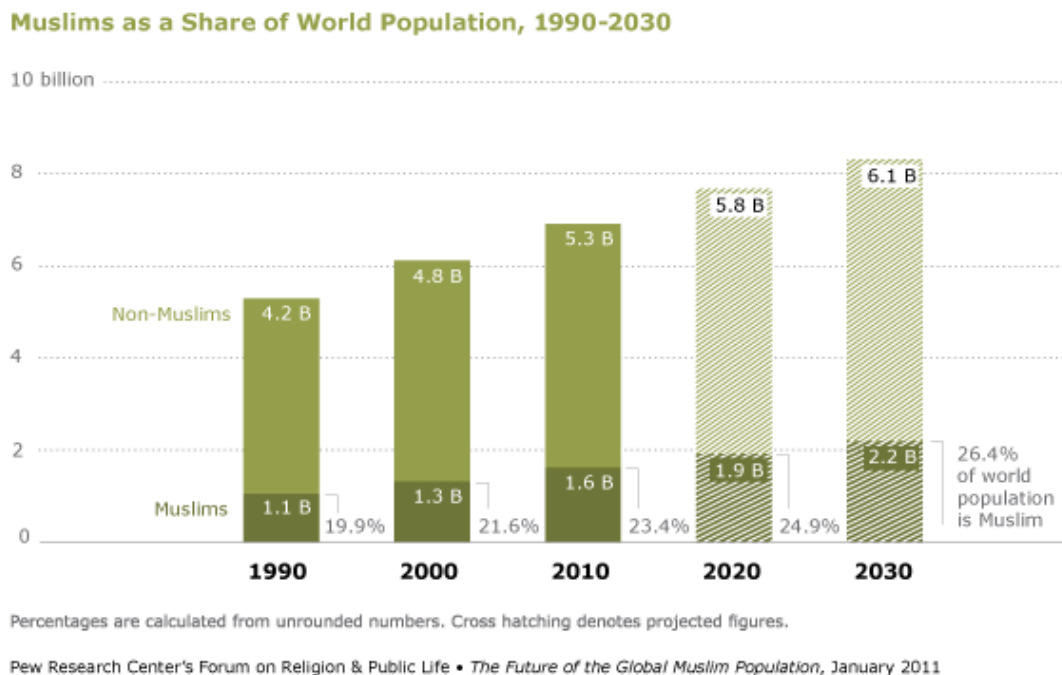


Figure 2

3. Content of the Research

As you can see in Figure 2, the Muslim population has rapidly grown and is expected to be approximately one-fourth of the world population in 2020.

- 1) In our picture book, we reflected basic matters of Islam such as scenes of the mosque, worship and fasting. The Quran in fact prohibits forcing people to worship the religion and also hurting people, and those who are involved in IS are only a select group of Muslims, so it is not right to imagine terrorism when we hear about Islam. Therefore, we mixed in simple expressions about how the Islamic State and Islam are different in our picture book. We set an elementary school to be the scene of the story in the book so that it could be easier for children to understand. The story is about helping classmates clarify misunderstandings about their Muslim classmate.
- 2) The result of the questionnaire asked to 100 visitors to the Culture Festival of Toyonaka High School:

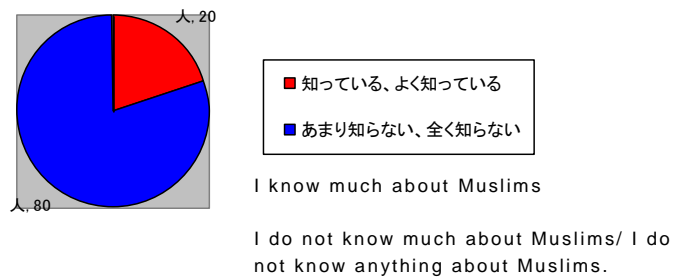


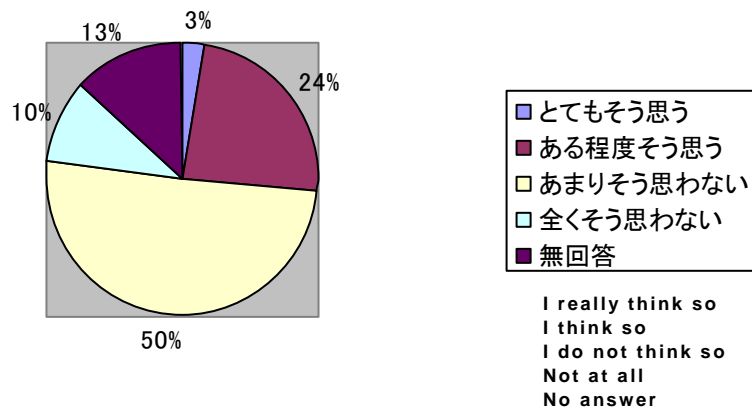
Figure 3

	I know about Muslims. I know about Muslims very well.	I do not know much about Muslims. I do not know anything about Muslims.
Image	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There are many people who don't have a good image about it. Hardly have any involvement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Scary, a lot of quarrel I do not know well.
What comes in mind	Pigs, Islam, IS, terrorism, Middle East, etc.	Islam, IS, terrorism, etc.

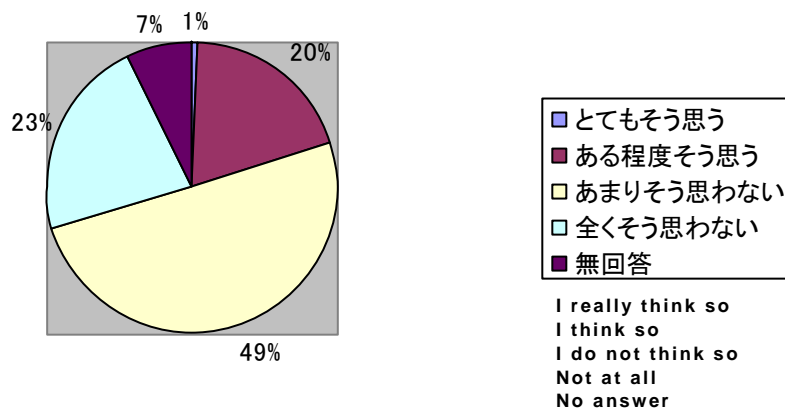
Figure 4

② Report by City of Gifu, "Awareness Survey against Foreigners"

Islam is a religion that values peace



I think I can get along well with Muslims



I want to know more about Islam

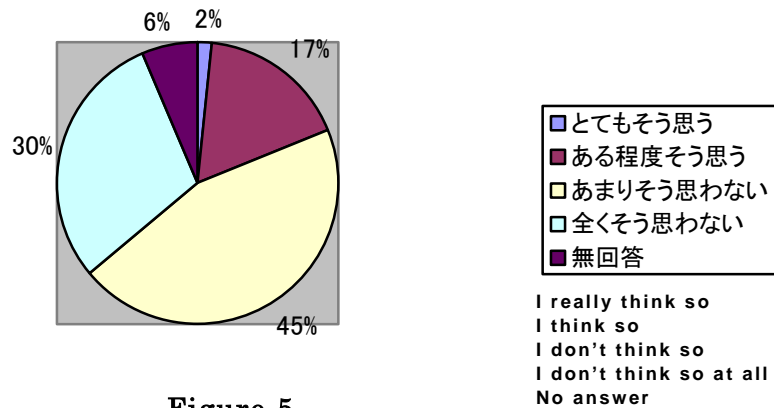


Figure 5

From the results of these 2 surveys it can be seen that currently, in Japan, there are a lot of people who do not know about Islam and imagine IS and terrorism from it. Also, many people seem to have a negative image and prejudice against Islam.

3) ① We requested the Imam at the Ibaraki Mosque to read our picture book. He nodded many times while reading the book then asked us to provide the book to the mosque, which we believe meant that the book was evaluated highly.

② We requested that first year students of Toyonaka High School take this picture book on their school trip to Indonesia and ask 10 Muslim students in Indonesia to read it. Their opinions included, "I am sad to know that people think Muslims are scary in Japan," "Not all Muslims are terrorists," "This book reflects the concept of Muslims well," and "It makes me happy." Also, there were opinions such as, "Because our clothing may give scary image to people, it would be nice to have explanations about our clothing," and "I want the book to explain that not all Muslims are living like the people in this book". From these opinions, we learned that this picture book delivers correct knowledge from the view of Muslim people, but the book needed to be improved as there is much more information about Islam and Muslims that should be included.

4) Originally, we were planning to go to the elementary school in the area around Toyonaka High School and separate the children into groups that we had read the book and had not read the book, then ask simple questions about Islam and compare the results to verify the effect of the book. However, because elementary school teachers pointed out there would be children who may react only to the word "terrorism" and the book contains some expressions too difficult for younger age students, we realized this picture book was not appropriate for students in lower grades like those in elementary schools.

Therefore, we switched our subjects to request reading this book to high school students. Additionally, to confirm the book was difficult for elementary

school students, we read it to 5 elementary school students.

① Validation subject to 160 first year students of Toyonaka High School

We requested 80 out of 160 students to read the picture book and the other 80 not to read it before answering our questions about Islam.

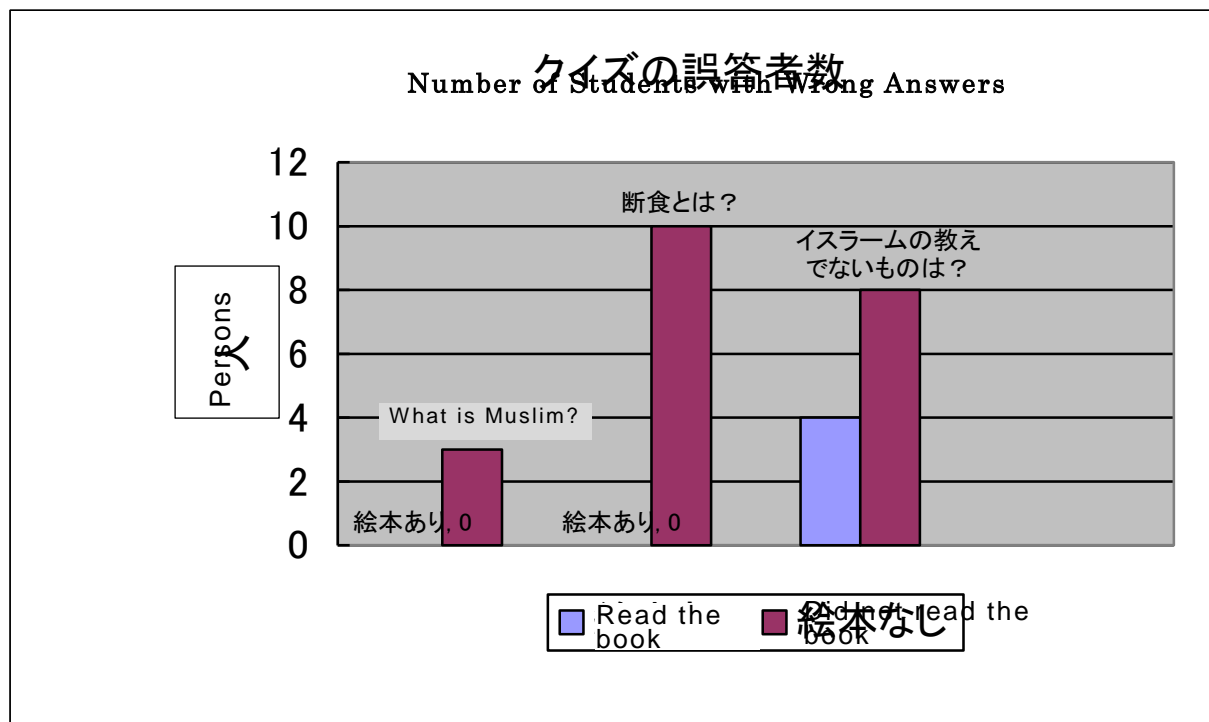


Figure 6

From these results, we can see the ones who read the picture book had a higher rate of giving correct answers.

② We read the book to 5 elementary school students (1 first year and 4 fourth year students) in Ikeda City. After that, we asked them questions and everybody answered correctly. The first year student said, "I do not understand" in his opinion, so we learned the book was actually difficult for the first year student of elementary schools. However, fourth year students stated: "I want to know more about Islam" which showed they had a positive impression about the issue.

With these validations, we found out that the picture book was difficult for children in younger grades of elementary school, but it was possible that the book motivates children to be interested in Islam and promotes their understanding.

4. Results of the Research and Future Assignment

In this study, we found out it was possible to clear up the misconception

about Islam in Japan and promote correct knowledge and understanding. However, it is difficult to bring up the issue of terrorism to students in early elementary grades, so we learned that we should just tell them about the basic matters of Islam and gradually explain about the issue's connection with terrorism as they grow older. Additionally, we would like to improve the content of the book based on the voices from Muslims, advice from teachers at Ueno Elementary School and the feedback from elementary school children in a way to make easier for younger children to read. Then, we would like to think about the way to make larger amount of people know about this activity and promote this picture book to all over Japan and to the world. We believe, by doing so, the correct understanding toward Islam will be achieved. As a result, it is expected that these activities will lead people to eliminate prejudice and have mutual understanding and, eventually make the world better place.

5. Reference

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