

## ***Easy-To-Read Books for Children with Dyslexia in Public Libraries***

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### **Abstract**

In Japan, most public libraries do not provide sufficient easy-reading materials or make available adequate reading facilities that are suitable for Japanese children with dyslexia. In contrast, in the Netherlands, the “Easy Reading Plaza” (*Makkelijk Lezen Plein*, MLP) is a special facility provided for children with reading disabilities, allowing them to see, read, and listen to books in various ways. Our study focused on easy-to-read books in the MLPs of public libraries in the Netherlands and Belgium, and gathered information on them through interviews with librarians. The public libraries investigated provide sufficient easy-reading materials as well as reading facilities suitable for all children, including children with dyslexia. The MLPs were designed for all children; books are set up at the front to make them easy to find, on shelves that are color classified by subject area. The librarians carefully select books for simple language, clear layout, appealing covers, and attractive content. Adapting the concept of the MLP to Japanese libraries might give all Japanese children the opportunity to read more books.

Keywords: dyslexia, public library, information accessibility

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## **Introduction**

Dyslexia is the most common neurological-specific learning disability (Lyon, Shaywitz, & Shaywitz, 2003). Dyslexic readers suffer from a phonological deficiency characterized by difficulties in associating phonemes with the graphemes, or written symbols, that represent them (Bradley & Bryant, 1978; Hulme & Snowling, 1992; Snowling, 1981).

In Japan, 4.5% of children with dyslexia have a learning disability; moreover, 2.4% of children find it hard to read or write (Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 2012). The Japanese language is written using three types of script—kanji, hiragana, and katakana—mixed together. Over the six years of primary school education in Japan, children are introduced to 1,006 different Kanji characters. Japanese children with dyslexia often struggle to read kanji they are expected to learn when they encounter them in books.

Public librarians are allowed to create audiobook and e-book versions of paper books for children with dyslexia under Article 37(2) of the Japanese Copyright Law (2009 revision) (Copyright Research and Information Center [CRIC], n.d.). Japanese children with dyslexia are often able to read using e-books with audio or Digital Accessible Information System (DAISY) formats; however, not all public libraries in Japan have access to books in these formats, and even if they do sometimes, not very many. There are still very few public libraries in Japan providing services for children with reading disabilities. Further, while borrowing for these books is open to people with visual impairment, developmental disabilities, dyslexia, and similar conditions, they are rarely borrowed by people with dyslexia. Most public libraries do not provide sufficient easy-reading materials or make available reading facilities suitable for children with dyslexia.

Most public libraries in the Netherlands have a *Makkelijk Lezen Plein* (“Easy Reading Plaza”) (ProBiblio, n.d.), and the concept is increasingly spreading through Belgium as well. The MLP is a special provision for children with reading difficulties, consisting of a reading environment tailored to allow them to see, read, and listen to books in various ways. Through MLPs, public libraries successfully promote reading in children with reading disabilities (ProBiblio, n.d.).

The purpose of this study is to investigate information accessibility for children with dyslexia in Japanese public libraries, and develop ways to improve it with reference to the best practice upheld by libraries in the Netherlands and the Belgium. In the present study, we focused on easy-to-read books in the MLPs of public libraries in these countries; information was gathered through interviews with librarians.

## **Methods**

### **Participants**

Seven adults—five women and two men—participated in the study. The participants worked for the education departments of public libraries in the Netherlands and Belgium; all participants' libraries had an MLP. Written informed consent was obtained from the participants. This study was approved by Sagami Women's University (No. 1505).

### **Procedure**

The interviews were conducted and surveys completed at the participants' libraries. Survey items consisted of three parts: provision and utilization of easy-to-read books, helping children with dyslexia in the MLP, and cooperation on children's reading between elementary schools and the library.

## **Results**

### **The provision and utilization of easy-to-read books**

1) When did you establish the MLP at your library?

Five libraries opened MLPs between 2004 and 2008, and one in 2013.

2) Do you think that the number of library users has increased since you opened the MLP at your library?

Respondents generally agreed that incorporating the MLP had design increased the number of library users—"strongly agree" received 5 responses, "agree," 1, and "neutral," 1; see Table 1.

Table 1

*The Number of Users in the Library Has Increased Since the Establishment of the MLP*

<u>Answer</u>	<u>n</u>
strongly agree	5
agree	1
neutral	1
disagree	0
strongly disagree	0

3) How many books do you have in the MLP of your library?

The number of books ranged from around 500 to around 800.

4) What criteria do you use to choose the books?

Criteria mentioned for choosing MLP books were as follows:

- The book has not many words on one page/a lot of white on the page.
- The book has big characters (print size) and many illustrations.
- The font is a font for people with dyslexia (Dyslexie font, n.d.).
- The book looks nice, is attractive, and has a good layout.
- The story is suitable for children, and the text is easy to understand.
- Sentences and words are not too long.

### 5) Can anyone use the books in the MLP?

In the MLPs are found not only easy-to-read books, but also CD-ROMs, DVDs, DAISY and different materials accessible to everyone.

### **Helping dyslexic children in the MLP**

#### 1) Do you arrange books in the MLP so that dyslexic children can find them easily?

Ways of arranging the books that were used in the MLPs were as follows:

- Books were identified with a *Makkelijk Lezen Plein* sticker.
- Dyslexic children wanted to look at the books and to browse through them and see them all.
  - There was a special section of the floor in the MLP where the books were mainly presented such that one could see the front.
  - The books are set in front.
  - The best thing for children is to set the books in front where children can see them, a little bit low down. Children certainly find it very nice to browse.
  - The books are set on a shelf that has been color classified for each subject area.

#### 2) What kinds of books are borrowed most often?

The most popular books in the MLPs were the following:

- The *Geronimo Stilton* series (written under the name of the main character), a series of adventures of a mouse journalist, with many colors, different fonts, and many illustrations.
- The *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* series by Jeff Kinney.
- *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* and other books by Roald Dahl.
- Some children with reading problems liked books with special fonts for dyslexic children (Dyslexie font, n.d.).

#### 3) Which book type do dyslexic children prefer, paper books or e-books?

According to the respondents, dyslexic children preferred paper books to e-books, and generally did not read e-books.

Table 2

*Dyslexic Children's Book Preference*

<u>Answer</u>	<u>n</u>
paper books	6
e-books	1

4) We can teach dyslexic children how to read the books in the MLP.

Three respondents chose “agree” (see Table 3). However, two respondents chose “neutral” and two respondents chose “disagree”; comments included “the library would recommend books for children to read, but the library could not be a personal assistant and read with them. Children had to read at school or at home.”

Table 3

*The Librarians Are Able to Teach Dyslexic Children How to Read Books*

<u>Answer</u>	<u>n</u>
strongly agree	0
Agree	3
Neutral	2
Disagree	2
strongly disagree	0

### **Cooperation with elementary schools**

1) Do you cooperate with elementary schools on dyslexic children?

The public libraries generally cooperated with local elementary schools. Comments included the following:

- In the education department of the library, they had a lot of contact with the schools.
- In the schools, there were special teachers for dyslexic children who would sometimes come to the library and ask them to recommend some books, or to show children the MLP, and the library would do that for the children.

2) Do you lend easy-to-read books to the elementary schools?

The public libraries lent easy-to-read books to the elementary school. The respondent's comments were as follows:

- The library lent easy-to-read books to the schools, and they could hold them

for 10 months.

- Every three weeks, all the classes from about six or seven schools in the neighborhood would come to get some books.
- Children would take one book for reading, one information book, and one book they would choose themselves, one comic book.

## **Conclusion**

The investigated public libraries in the Netherlands and Belgium provide sufficient easy-reading materials as well as reading facilities suitable for all children, including children with dyslexia. The MLPs are designed for all children, and it was found that children like books placed out in front that they could see easily and books that had stickers to identify their subject matter. Librarians working on the MLPs carefully select books for simple language, clear layout, appealing covers, and attractive content; they also cooperate with and support elementary schools and teachers, as well as children and their parents. Overall, respondents perceive MLPs as effective at fostering reading among all children. Dyslexic children might be able to learn ways of reading the books in the MLP; however, the librarians have different views from library to library. The results also suggest that the public libraries support and encourage reading and the joy of reading, and that to specialize in teaching children with reading disabilities might be perceived as a responsibility of schools, not libraries.

Adopting the MLP concept might give many more Japanese children the opportunity to read more books using various media. In future study, the author considers ways to improve the reading environment for children with dyslexia in Japanese public libraries.

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## **Appendix**

### **Question Items**

#### **The provision of easy-to-read books, and its utilization**

- 1) When did you establish the MLP at your library?
- 2) Do you think that the number of library users has increased since you opened the MLP at your library?
- 3) How many books do you have in the MLP of your library?
- 4) What criteria do you use to choose the books?
- 5) Can anyone use the books in the MLP?

#### **Helping for dyslexic children in their MLP**

- 1) Do you arrange books in the MLP so that dyslexic children can find them easily?
- 2) What kinds of books are borrowed most often?
- 3) Which book type do dyslexic children prefer, paper books or e-books?
- 4) We can teach dyslexic children how to read the books in the MLP.

#### **Cooperation with elementary schools**

- 1) Do you cooperate with the elementary schools on dyslexic children?
- 2) Do you lend easy-to-read books to the elementary schools?