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小学校英語教科書における英語の文字の出現頻度

メタデータ	<p>言語: Japanese</p> <p>出版者: 東京学芸大学大学院連合学校教育学研究科</p> <p>公開日: 2023-10-27</p> <p>キーワード (Ja): 英語科教育, 小学校, 英語の文字の頻度, 教科書, ETYP:教育関連論文, SSUB:英語</p> <p>キーワード (En): English education, elementary school, frequency of English letters, textbooks</p> <p>作成者: 小竹, 空翼, 伊東, 哲</p> <p>メールアドレス:</p> <p>所属: 東京学芸大学, 啓明学園初等学校, 東京学芸大学</p>
URL	<p>http://hdl.handle.net/2309/0002000058</p>

Frequency of English Letters in the English Textbooks for Elementary Schools

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Many studies have shown that frequency of English letters affects the acquisition of letters. The purpose of this study is to investigate letter frequency in English textbooks for elementary schools and clarify the extent to which students are exposed to English letters through the textbooks. A total of 17 textbooks including the textbooks published by Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) and the MEXT-authorized textbooks published by seven publishers were analyzed. The researchers typed all letters that appear in the textbooks, except for ones which are difficult to recognize because of their small size or distorted design. Then the letters were classified into two types: letters that appear in parts related to the content of instruction (Type 1), and letters that appear in other parts such as activity headings (Type 2). In the data analysis, the following aspects were examined: (a) a total number of letters in each textbook, and its breakdown for upper or lowercase letters, and whether they are Type 1 or 2; (b) the frequency of respective letters in each textbook and the difference of tendencies between the textbooks; (c) the percentage of letters that are used as romanization of Japanese; and (d) the correlation with general letter frequency. The results showed that (a) a total number of letters varied considerably among the MEXT-authorized textbooks: the textbook with the largest number of letters had approximately twice as many letters as the textbook with the smallest number of letters. (b) The frequency of respective letters also differed significantly: for upper-case letters, the most frequent letter L was approximately 29 times more frequent than the least frequent letter X, and for lower-case letters, the most frequent

letter e was approximately 103 times more frequent than the least frequent letter q. The researchers calculated the expected frequencies of letters and compared them with the observed frequencies to determine whether there are textbooks with unusual letter frequency. It revealed that some letters appeared excessively in some textbooks and it was mainly due to letters which appeared as Type 2. (c) The percentage of letters that are used as romanization of Japanese was not very high of the total number of letters. However, the percentage was relatively high in certain letters or textbooks so it may have influenced the frequency of some letters. (d) The correlation coefficients between letter frequency in the textbooks and general letter frequency suggested that they were almost identical for lower-case letters and also identical to some degree for upper-case letters. These findings could be used by teachers to understand characteristics of the textbooks that they use and implement more effective letter instruction.

Key words

English education, elementary school, frequency of English letters, textbooks

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