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A survey of kindergarten parents regarding their attitudes toward early intensive English-language instruction and its potential introduction at a small-scale, rural primary school.

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小規模地方小学校における早期集中英語教育とその導入に対する幼稚園児の親の姿勢について

As English language instruction at the elementary level in Japan becomes more widespread and approaches official sanctioning from the Ministry of Education it is important to know how parents view options for the foreign-language education of their children. The current study examines results of a questionnaire administered to parents of local kindergarten children in Nayoro City, Japan and attempts to gauge how receptive these parents would be towards a proposed early English immersion programme in one of the region's small, rural elementary schools. Results indicated that the majority of parents hold views that are favourable to the principles underlying the establishment of such a programme, wanting their children to develop communicative skills in English from an early age. Opinions regarding education in a small-scale, rural environment are mixed, showing a slight tendency toward favourability in most regards except for issues of transportation/accessibility, first-language development, and continuity with pre-school. This suggests that an early English immersion programme in such a setting could be successful if these key concerns can effectively be addressed.

日本の小学校で英語教育がますます盛んになり、文部科学省からのお墨付きをもらうようになると、子どもの外国語教育に対して親がどう見ているのかを知ることが重要になってくる。この研究は、名寄市で幼稚園児を持つ親たちに対して実施したアンケート結果を検証し、地方の小規模小学校で初期英語イマージョン教育を行うという提案に対して親たちがどの程度受け入れてくれるのかを調べようとしたものである。結果的に、大多数の親が、初期英語イマージョン教育を行う根拠となる理念に対しては好意的な意見を持っており、早い時期から自分の子どもたちが英語のコミュニケーションスキルを伸ばすことを期待していることがわかった。農村地域の小規模小学校では教育に関する意見がはっきりせず、交通の便、第一言語の発達、幼稚園との連続性といった問題を除いては、そうした地域での教育に対してわずかではあるが好意的な傾向が見られた。したがって、こうした問題点をうまく解消することができれば、田舎の小規模学校でも初期英語教育が成功する可能性があるということである。

I. INTRODUCTION:

Over the last decade or so, English language lessons have become increasingly common in elementary school classrooms in Japan as one component of the curriculum-wide Integrated Studies periods. The National Ministry of Education is currently studying whether to make English an officially required subject at the elementary level. At the same time, early immersion English-language education has been attracting nation-wide attention recently due to the opening in spring 2005 of a high-profile school in Ota City, Gunma Prefecture under the spectre of the national government's "Special

Structural Reform Zones” initiative, as well as the success of Japan’s first private-school immersion programme, Katoh Gakuen, which began in 1992 in Numazu City Shizuoka Prefecture and graduated its first cohort of students from high school in March 2004, many of whom went on to prestigious universities abroad (Bostwick, 2003).

In a previous paper (Meadows, 2005), I presented a proposal for a small-scale English immersion programme at Naka-Nayoro elementary school in the city of Nayoro, Hokkaido. The current study is intended to gauge local parents’ attitudes towards three aspects of foreign-language education thought to be especially relevant to the successful implementation of such a programme: 1) attitudes towards the place of English in Japanese society, 2) attitudes toward English-language education at an early age, especially as it concerns their children, and 3) attitudes toward education in a small-scale, rural school context.

The first aspect is reasonably self-explanatory. English is the foreign language of choice in Japan, comprising nearly 100% of foreign-language instruction at middle and secondary school levels, where it is compulsory (The Japan Forum, 2005). At least some proficiency in English is required to do well on high-school and university entrance examinations. In other words, almost all Japanese people have had the experience of studying a foreign language, almost certainly English. How has this experience shaped their views of English and foreign language education? In what ways, if any, do they think it important for Japanese to develop proficiency in English?

This relates closely with the second aspect. How do parents feel about foreign/English language education for their children? In Nayoro, all elementary-age children now have some limited experience of learning English with a foreign teacher. Occasional English classes are given to senior class children at the kindergarten where this present survey was administered. What do parents of pre-school children in Nayoro think about this early introduction to English? Do they hold the kinds of beliefs that would make them receptive to a more intensive language programme such as immersion, were it possible? At what age do they consider it most advantageous or appropriate for children to begin study of a foreign language, if at all? Do they prefer the current situation, or have other preferences altogether?

Additionally, a third objective of the present study is to ascertain the attitudes of city parents towards primary education in a small, rural school environment. Specifically, there are currently four such elementary schools in Nayoro (two at the time this survey was conducted), to which parents may send their children regardless of where they live in the city jurisdiction. As a municipal entity, Nayoro City encompasses both urban and rural areas. Rural children must attend the school in their area, but urban residents may choose to send their children to a rural school provided total pupil numbers do not exceed capacity as prescribed by the city board of education. To what degree are city parents of kindergarten and elementary-aged children aware of their right to choose? What are the most strongly perceived advantages and disadvantages of such schools? What percentage of parents would be interested enough to learn more about such schools, and would an “intensive” English-language programme at such a school influence their perceptions?

II. PROCEDURE:

A questionnaire was constructed, consisting of three sections. An English translation of the questionnaire is found in Appendix 1. The first section gathers demographic information from the survey takers with an eye towards a statistical analysis of the data to ascertain whether there is any correlation between attitudes and such characteristics as age, economic status, education, family constitution, and uniquely personal experience such as travel abroad or elective language study in a private setting. Demographic data follows a generic Japanese categorization of these items, and thus attempts to skirt some topics that can be sensitive in the Japanese context, particularly those of divorce and single motherhood as well as income. Questions requesting such data were included in this section on the assumption that family circumstance and economic status would be likely to correlate with a more favourable attitude towards the principles of immersion language teaching. Research in Canada, for example, has found that, in general, parents of immersion students are from higher socio-economic backgrounds and are more likely to have a postsecondary education (Statistics Canada, 2004).

The second part of the questionnaire was divided into two distinct sections, the first of which consisted of 22 items expressed as statements on English (foreign) language learning in general and on English (foreign) language instruction

practices in the Japanese context. Respondents were asked to respond to each according to a four-level Likert scale (1=strongly disagree, 2=somewhat disagree, 3=somewhat agree, 4=strongly agree), circling the number which best matched their own opinion. Originally, a five-point Likert scale allowed for a neutral position, but a trial run revealed a proclivity for respondents to be non-committal. Since foreign language instruction is something that all Japanese adults have undergone and are, to some degree, familiar with, it was decided to 'force' respondents to commit to an opinion by removing the middle option. This also made it possible to determine the raw percentage of respondents who agreed (or, in the case of those worded negatively, disagreed - indicating a favourable opinion) with each statement. Since a main objective of the questionnaire was to assess receptiveness to the possible introduction of an English immersion programme in Nayoro, the second section poses some direct yes/no questions about immersion. However, recognizing that most parents would be unlikely to know very much, if anything, about immersion, a brief objective introduction was also felt to be necessary.

The third and final part of the questionnaire turns to the question of perceived educational conditions at small-scale rural schools. Again, there are two distinct sections and these essentially follow the pattern established in part two of the questionnaire, however a brief background introduction is presented at the beginning of the first section on the assumption that most parents are unlikely to have experienced such a school firsthand, may not be familiar with the situation in Nayoro City itself, nor perhaps have ever previously given any thought to the differences between larger, urban schools and small-scale, rural ones. Part 3(1) consists of 15 statements to which respondents are asked to reply on a 3-point Likert scale (1= inclined to disagree, 2= don't know/no opinion, 3= inclined to agree). The middle option here allows for respondents to 'opt out' of expressing an opinion one way or the other because it was felt that some people would feel they lacked sufficient information, or interest, to decide. Part 3(2) again poses some direct yes/no questions intended to glean the extent of parents' interest in a small-scale, rural school for their own child's education, and their receptiveness to an immersion-style language programme in such an environment.

III. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION:

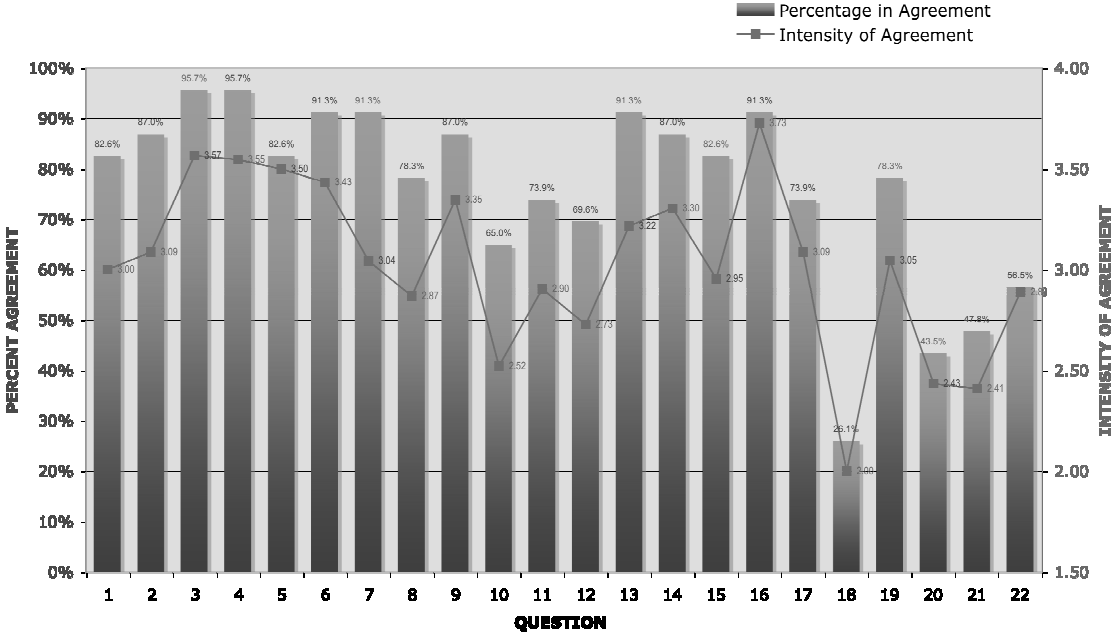
The questionnaire was given to 32 parents whose children attend local middle or senior kindergarten classes and who had no older children already in primary school. It was felt that parents with one or more children already in attendance at a city primary school might give less objective consideration to those aspects of the survey dealing with education in a small-school, rural environment and should be treated as a separate population. Results gathered from this group are the subject of the present paper, however, the questionnaire was concurrently administered to all parents of grade 1 and 2 children in Nayoro city-area schools, thus providing a body of data suitable to determining the significance of any correlations that might be found between attitudes and demographic features. As the current sample size is comparatively small, it was felt that there was little to be gleaned from making a correlational analysis of the data. Of the 32 questionnaires distributed, 23 were returned, a return rate of roughly 72%. Reviewing the demographic data, of note is the fact that 91.3% of respondents were women, predominantly homemakers (78.3%), and largely middle-income (69.6%). The majority of respondents' households (87%) were two-parent families. This is perhaps typical of the kind of household that can afford, both time-wise and financially, to send their children to kindergarten in the first place. Kindergarten is not a required part of the education system in Japan, as it is in some countries, and there is little economic support for parents who might wish to send their children there but haven't the resources. This somewhat limits the validity of applying results gathered from this survey group to the wider population.

Respondents' numerical responses to the items of part 2 and 3 were tabulated and analyzed. All negatively worded items were reverse-valued, that is, in part 2(1) the actual response values of 1 & 4, or 2 & 3 were 'reversed', and in part 3 (1) the response values 3 & 1 are switched, such that the larger numbers represent a favourable attitude to features or principles representative of early-immersion education [part 2(1)] and to characteristics of small-scale rural education [part 3(1)]. In other words, disagreement with negatively-worded statements is construed as favourable to the wider aim of establishing an English immersion programme at a small-scale, rural school in Nayoro City.

Such an approach allows the data to be used to calculate a raw percentage of those in agreement with the

principles behind this goal, for both part 2(1) and part 3(1) overall, and for each individual item. Additionally, in these sections, responses to each item were averaged, and the median and mode calculated. From these calculations, the intensity or strength of agreement or disagreement can be discerned. Figure 1 below shows the percentage of agreement (bars) in the responses to each item of part 2(1), and the intensity of agreement (line) on the scale of 1 to 4.

Figure 1 - Percentage and Intensity of Agreement - Part 2(1)



Looking at the raw percentage of respondents in agreement with the item statements, the results are generally favourable. Over 90% of respondents want to become fluent in English (Q6) and make foreign friends (Q4). An equal percentage agree that Japanese need to be able to use English (Q3) and that this ability should more importantly be that of speaking, rather than reading and/or writing (Q7), but substantially fewer respondents (69.6%) consider a native-like accent (Q12) to be essential. Over 80% of respondents feel that English is the most important foreign language for Japanese people to learn (Q1) and that it is a necessary language for understanding other cultures (Q2). Fewer again (78.3%), however, agree that better work awaits those who can speak English (Q8). This is still a substantial majority, however, taken in conjunction with the lower intensity of agreement (2.87), responses to this item would appear to substantiate the impression that Japanese motivation to learn English is as often intrinsic as it is instrumental. 82.6% of respondents claimed that they often watch western movies and listen to western music (Q5)¹, yet substantially fewer of them (65%) actually buy or rent English-language books and videos for their children (Q10). This may be more indicative of a lack of suitable materials available for children as compared to the abundance of easily-accessed, adult-oriented material². However, a high 87% want their children to be able to speak English (Q9). This gap may suggest that parents look more towards the education system as a provider of language education than to the application of their own resources.

When it comes to the study of English per se, a moderate 73.9% said that learning English is fun (Q11), and, again, the comparatively weak intensity of agreement here adds to the impression that respondents' language learning experiences have not always been without struggle. Additional comments by respondents (see Appendix 2) also support this assumption. Of note is the very large percentage (91.3%, coupled with a strong intensity of agreement) who believe that children learn English more quickly than adults (Q16) and, perhaps surprisingly, the very low percentage of

¹ "Western" is generally, but not always, taken to mean "English" in Japan.
² The vast majority of rental videos in Japan are offered in their original language with Japanese subtitles. Relatively few videos are dubbed into Japanese, and these latter are often children's videos.

respondents (26.1%) who believe that adults are, in the end, at any significant disadvantage when it comes to being able to master a foreign language (Q18). This may relate to the more conservative, although majority, acceptance (73.9%) of the idea that the earlier one begins to study English, the better (Q17). There is a very strong perception (91.3% in agreement) that a communicative approach to language learning is not dependent on a pre-requisite understanding of grammar (Q13) and a consistently high (over 80%) preference for learning from native speakers whether the learning objectives are exam-oriented or not (Q14, Q15). Less than half of respondents, however, believe that studying a foreign language will make their children smarter (Q21), again contributing to the idea that motivation for study of English, as much as for their children as for themselves, is intrinsically derived.

Responses to items 19 and 20 are of particular interest. A significant majority of 78.3% feel that there is no harm to children's first language development caused by beginning the study of English at a very young age, but more than half (56.5%) believe that children should have a solid grasp of Japanese before they attempt to learn a second language. This discrepancy may simply indicate parents' concerns that their children's first language development be properly nurtured at the same time as they learn another language, a principle well within keeping of those of immersion education. Such concern reflects that among Canadian parents in the early days of that country's first steps towards widespread French immersion. In Canada and other countries, research has shown that children's first language skills are not in any way adversely affected by an early, intensive contact with a second language. Rather, early total immersion in the second language, although responsible for a slight lag in first language literacy skills at the beginning, ultimately can lead to improved first-language abilities, often exceeding the levels of their monolingual peers. Quite naturally, however, Japanese parents are not likely to be easily assuaged by research from other countries alone, and this concern for first-language proficiency needs to be taken seriously if any immersion programme is going to be successful. In fact, because of the dissimilarity between English and Japanese, and the complexity of the Japanese written language, the model for early English immersion in Japan has been that of beginning instruction in both languages concurrently, with a roughly 30:70 Japanese to English split (Bostwick, 2003).

Responses to the direct yes/no questions of part 2(2) were accorded a zero (0) value for 'no', and a value of one (1) for 'yes'. The percentage of 'yes' responses is recorded on the data chart in Appendix 2. More than two thirds of respondents in total said that foreign language education should begin in kindergarten or early elementary while only 21.7% believe that the current pattern of beginning in the first year of middle school is appropriate. A significant number of these kindergarten parents (43.5%) would like their children to have some form of English language education now, while they are in kindergarten. Interest in immersion appears to be high, with 65.2% saying they are willing to attend a meeting to learn more. Were an immersion programme available, 73.9% would consider enrolling their child, even more (82.5%), if that programme were in a small, rural school.

Part 3 of the questionnaire pertains to education in a small-scale rural setting, and data were treated the same way as in part 2. For part 3(1), the raw percentage of those circling '3' – in other words agreeing with the statement – were calculated, while the average of all responses on the scale of 1 to 3 were averaged, thus giving some idea of the overall intensity of agreement or disagreement.

Figure 2 - Percent of Total Response by Type - Part 3(1)

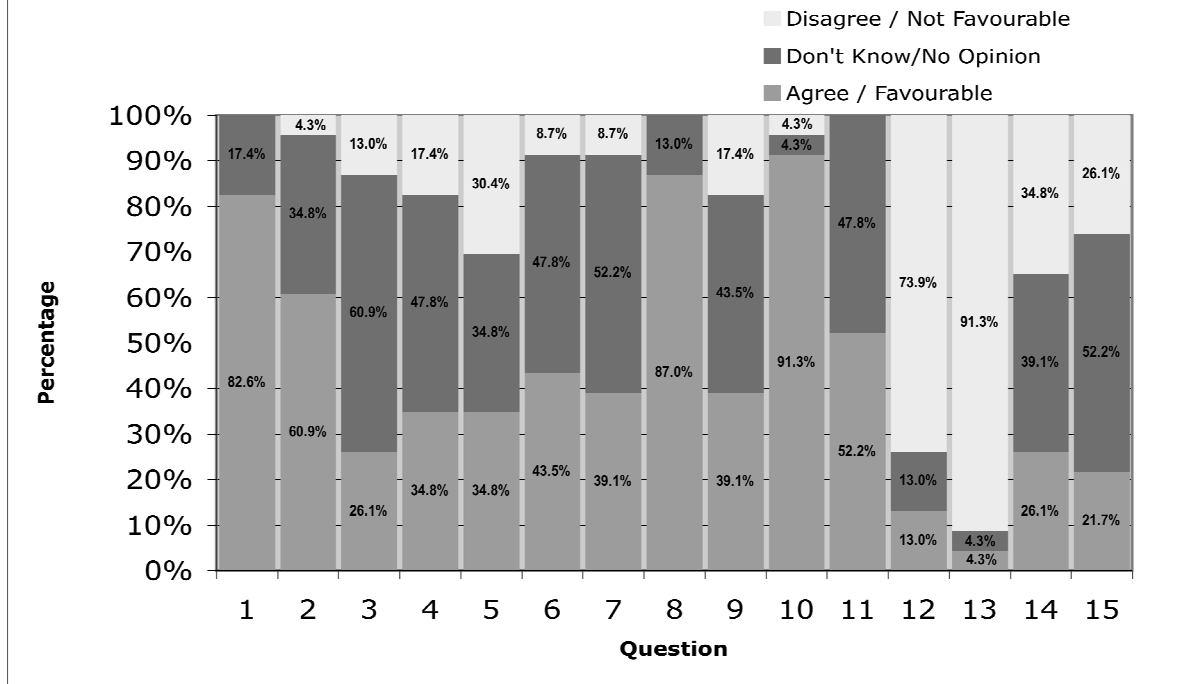


Figure 2 shows the percentages of each response to each item in part 3(1). It can be seen at a glance that attitudes in this section were much more mixed than in the previous part 2(1). The overall percentage of responses that represent attitudes or opinions favourable towards education in a small-scale, rural setting is 43.8% of the total, while those that disagree with the statements, or are unfavourable, stand at 22%. A larger percentage than this latter (34.2%) is undecided, which may reflect the lack of familiarity that many parents have with the context. By item, there are, in total, only 5 statements with which a majority of respondents agree - items 1, 2, 8, 10 & 11 – and only three of which could be considered a strong majority. It is largely accepted that children attending a small-scale, rural school can receive an education more tailored to their individual needs (Q1), and that they benefit through a greater interaction with nature (Q8) and the local community (Q10). Some 60.9% believe that children are more likely to learn self-responsibility (Q2), while just over half are inclined to think that teachers at a small-scale school are able to respond more effectively to parents’ concerns (Q11).

On the other hand, there are only 2 items for which the majority of respondents express a negative judgment – items 12 and 13, which deal with perceived difficulties resulting from the distance of such schools from the city area. Fully 91.3% say that, without a school bus (Q13), it’s too troublesome for their children to attend these schools, and 87% worry about their own ability to get to such schools in the case of an emergency (Q12). Two more items (Q14 & Q15) show a slight majority of negative sentiment over positive, but with the largest percentage of respondents choosing not to take either position. The response to these items hints that a significant number of parents may be reluctant to choose a small-scale, rural school if it means losing relationships built during kindergarten years by themselves (Q15) as well as their children (Q14).

Conversely, each of the various features of small-scale, rural education stated in items 3 to 7, as well as in item 9, have a higher proportion of respondents expressing a favourable viewpoint than a negative one, but again the majority of respondents remain undecided. Interestingly, among this group of items, receptiveness to the notions that English/International Awareness classes are more effective in (Q6), or that an intensive language programme like immersion is more suited to (Q7), a small-school environment appears to be somewhat lukewarm. A relatively low percentage of respondents (8.7% for each item) disagree with these notions, but the number of undecided comfortably exceeds those in agreement. It may be that the overall high percentage of respondents opting out of making a decision one way or the other is due to the fact that this particular group of parents has not yet had any personal experience with the city elementary school system and have yet to give much thought to the options available to them, nor are they likely to be overly familiar with the current elementary school

curriculum vis-à-vis English language education.

More importantly for the stated objectives of this questionnaire, a majority of parents responded favourably when asked directly, in part 3(2) about whether they would give serious consideration to sending their children to such a school (52.2%), and if they would be interested in visiting such a school to learn more (69.6%). While most parents felt they know too little about the issue to take a firm stand on the previous part's statements, some 60.9% said that they had been aware of the 'barrier free' status of these rural schools prior to answering this questionnaire. Finally, the response to the last item of the questionnaire provides a curious contrast to part 2(2), item 2c. It is essentially the same question being asked but, from the perspective of English language education in part 2, 82.6% of responses were favourable, while, from the perspective of small-scale, rural school, only 56.5% responded favourably.

IV. CONCLUSION:

Overall, the results of this questionnaire indicate that the majority of parents share a desire for their children to learn to use English communicatively from an early age and suggest that an early immersion programme in Nayoro would be received with substantial interest. Although it is difficult, through their responses to this questionnaire alone, to weigh the relative advantages and disadvantages that parents may ascribe to particular aspects of the learning environment in a small-scale, rural elementary school in detail, the results do suggest that many parents would be inclined to a favourable view if other, more pragmatic concerns such as transportation, pre-school continuity, and first-language development can be addressed. The high level of agreement with many of the principles of early immersion language education, and the relatively high percentage of parents that would prefer to see more exposure to English at the kindergarten level evoke the Canadian experience, where 6.8% of all English-language public-school children are voluntarily enrolled in French immersion (Government of Canada Privy Council Office, 2003). Results of this questionnaire give weight to the argument that interest would be strong enough to fill classrooms to the limited capacity permitted at Naka-Nayoro elementary school, site of the proposed programme. Furthermore, it would not seem overly optimistic to believe that a centrally-located and easily accessible early-immersion school or programme in Nayoro could successfully recruit a total percentage of students similar to that of the Canadian example.

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PART 2: THOUGHTS ON FOREIGN (ENGLISH) LANGUAGE EDUCATION

(1) Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements about language learning by circling the appropriate number as per the scale below.

| | 1 strongly disagree | 2 somewhat disagree | 3 somewhat agree | 4 strongly agree |
|---|------------------------|------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| 1. English is the most important foreign language for Japanese. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 2. English is necessary for us to understand foreign cultures. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 3. Japanese have no need for English. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 4. I want to make foreign friends. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 5. I often watch western movies and listen to western music. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 6. I want to become fluent in English. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 7. Being able to read and write English is more important than being able to speak it. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 8. We can find better work if we can speak English. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 9. I definitely want my child to be able to speak English. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 10. I often rent or buy English books and videos for my children. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 11. It's fun to study English. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 12. It is essential to have native-like pronunciation when speaking English. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 13. We need a solid understanding of grammar before beginning to study English conversation. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 14. It is better to learn English from a native speaker. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 15. We need to learn English from a Japanese English teacher in order to pass entrance exams. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 16. Children learn English more quickly than adults. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 17. The earlier one begins to study English (or any foreign language) the better. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 18. It is impossible for adults to truly master a second language. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 19. Beginning the study of English too early negatively effects the development of Japanese skills. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 20. Children should develop literacy in Japanese before beginning to study a foreign language. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 21. Studying a foreign language will make my child smarter. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 22. The current number of English instruction hours at elementary schools should be increased. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

Please add any additional comments you might have about English education in the school system.

(2) Circle the most suitable response.

1. Currently the Japanese education system requires the study of a foreign language beginning the first year of middle school (Grade 7). However, when do you think is the most appropriate level at which to begin studying a foreign language such as English.

Kindergarten • Early Elementary (1~3) • Late Elementary (4~6) • Middle School
High School • College/University • A foreign language is unnecessary.

2. Immersion is an approach to language education in which a foreign language is used more than 50% of the time to teach any or all subjects (except for Japanese). Research has shown that immersion students tend to attain high levels in BOTH their languages, develop a higher awareness of their own and other cultures, and acquire good study habits. The first immersion programme in Japan was begun in 1992 at a private school in Numazu, Shizuoka. More recently, some other cities in Japan have begun to implement their own immersion programmes. Ota City in Gunma is one that has attracted some media attention. In the future, it might be possible to begin an immersion programme in Nayoro.

- a) Would you be interested in attending a meeting with other interested parents to learn more about immersion ?

Yes No

- b) If there were an immersion programme available in Nayoro for your child now, would you consider enrolling your child?

Yes No

- c) If that immersion programme were in a small, rural school in Nayoro, would you be interested in enrolling your child?

— Yes No

PART 3: THOUGHTS ON A RURAL, SMALL-SCALE EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

- (1) Among Nayoro city elementary schools, there are two small-scale, rural schools - Naka-Nayoro Elementary School and Chiebung Elementary School. Both schools strive to make educational use of the natural and local environments in which they are located. Members of the local community are active participants in fields days, school festivals, and other school activities, such as assisting students in the maintenance of rice and vegetable gardens. Both schools are specially designated by the Nayoro Board of Education as “barrier free” schools, meaning that any child in the greater Nayoro area is free to attend these schools regardless of their allotted school zone. However, class sizes are limited to a maximum of 8 students per grade. Additionally, in the case of Naka-Nayoro Elementary School, English language and International Understanding classes are offered more than 25 times over the course of the school year as part of the Integrated Studies component.

Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements about small-scale schooling by circling the appropriate number as per the scale below.

1 2 3
inclined to disagree don't know • no opinion inclined to agree

- | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Fewer students mean that children receive instruction better matched to their abilities. | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 2. Fewer students mean that children are more likely to develop self-responsibility. | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 3. Fewer students will cause children to develop a weaker competitive spirit. | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 4. Fewer students make it more difficult for children to develop social skills. | 1 | 2 | 3 |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 5. Fewer students limit the number and variety of educational activities that can be used. | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 6. In a small-school environment, English/International Understanding classes are more effective. | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 7. Intensive language instruction such as immersion is suited to a small-school environment. | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 8. Children benefit from a more involved educational interaction with the natural environment. | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 9. The small number of teachers places students at a disadvantage. | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 10. Children develop a stronger sense of their roots through more frequent interaction with members of the local community. | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 11. In a small school, it's easier for teachers to respond effectively to parents' concerns. | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 12. I worry that the school is too far away for me to respond to an emergency. | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 13. It's too much trouble if there is no school bus. | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 14. I worry about the effect on my child of going to a different school than his pre-school friends. | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 15. It's difficult to build relationships with other parents in a different school zone from my own. | 1 | 2 | 3 |

Please add any additional comments you might have about education in a small-scale, rural environment.

(2) Circle the most suitable response.

a) Prior to participating in this survey, were you aware that both Naka-Nayoro and Chiebun Elementary Schools were “barrier-free” schools that can accept any child from the wider Nayoro area up to its prescribed capacity limit?

Yes **No**

b) Would you ever give any serious thought in the future to enrolling your child in a small, rural school or a school with a small-scale educational policy?

Yes **No**

c) Would you be interested in visiting one of these schools to learn more?

Yes **No**

d) If one of these small-scale, rural schools in Nayoro were host to an English immersion programme, would you be interested in enrolling your child?

Yes **No**

APPENDIX 2: Additional Comments (translated from the Japanese)

PART 2: THOUGHTS ON FOREIGN (ENGLISH) LANGUAGE EDUCATION

Respondent #2

It's good to have an environment in which children can become familiar with English from an early age. There is no opportunity to use English in everyday life so if children learn to enjoy using English when they are young, I think it motivates them in their studies later on.

If it's simply learning about grammar, then the current pattern of starting in middle school is good enough, I think.

Respondent #3

Sadly, I was not able to digest a single thing I studied in either English class or cram school. I want my child to become much more confident and comfortable with English than I did.

Respondent #7

When I was in Junior high school, I hated my English teacher and because of that I came to dislike English and hardly studied it at all. Later, though, I became friends with a foreign exchange student and enjoyed trying to communicate with her with what little broken English I had. Even now I have no desire to study English, but I want to try to speak it. And I want my children too to experience the fun of learning English by trying to speak it.

Respondent #8

Whether one begins early or not, if a child enjoys it and is interested enough to pursue it, I think (s)he can pick up a language. If my child(ren) are interested in learning English, they'll learn it. If they're not interested in English, it's fine if they develop in other areas like sports. I don't see any need for my children to begin learning a language early.

Respondent #12

The way English has been taught till now is not good. There should be a curriculum in which children can have fun while learning.

Respondent #23

I remember the English education that we received as being only writing and memorizing, so I want our children to receive an education in which they learn English naturally while having fun.

PART 3: THOUGHTS ON A RURAL, SMALL-SCALE EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

Respondent #3

I think that some sports like baseball and soccer require a certain number of kids in order to play and that this might not be possible in such schools.

Respondent #7

If you grow up there and plan to stay there, I don't think there's a problem. Because my family won't ever live any place smaller than Nayoro (Nayoro is already small anyway, I think), I want my children to get used to being among larger groups of people. I see no reason to prefer small-scale at all.

Respondent #8

I think it's great that children can interact with nature and that, through contact with local farmers, they can understand the 'roots' of foods in a way not possible at other schools. I think children can develop an appreciation and gratitude for the importance of the food we eat everyday.

Respondent #12

I think that both children and parents can feel safe about going to such schools.

Respondent #13

I was brought up with an English education that was exam-oriented and focused on grammar, but I feel it's difficult for such education to effectively enable one to communicate with foreigners. I am very interested in English and want to be able to speak it fluently but, unfortunately, with current educational practices it's not possible to hope for that.

Respondent #18

I'm not against English language education per se but the simplistic thinking that says English equals International Understanding and Awareness is dangerous, I think. I think it's necessary for us to rethink the very way we educate for International Understanding and Awareness in Japan.

Respondent #21

English that's useful in everyday situations should be taught.

Respondent #23

Both of us hope our children grow up carefree in a place surrounded by nature, so we are very interested in small-scale, rural elementary education. I would definitely like to enroll my children if I can be satisfied with both instructional and transportation arrangements.