

Study-aid Books and Workbooks in Japanese Public Libraries: Questionnaire and Holdings Survey

Mayu Ogawa ^{*}, Keita Tsuji ^{*}

Abstract

Japan is no longer a prosperous country, and the number of junior high and high school students from low-income families is increasing. Public libraries should provide resources that can aid in the learning and development of these children. Based on that premise, we conducted (1) a survey on Japanese public libraries' holdings of study-aid books and workbooks for junior high and high school students and (2) a questionnaire survey of libraries with and without these books. The number of study-aid books and workbooks surveyed is 652, which were selected from Gakusan.com. Calil's Library API and Questant in Macromill, Inc. were used for the holdings and questionnaire surveys, respectively. The number of respondents to the questionnaire was 122. Holdings survey showed that the number of libraries with study-aid books and workbooks was relatively small. The questionnaire survey showed that the libraries without these books are most concerned about "writing," however, according to the libraries with these books, writing is no different from other books, and damage and loss are no further additional from other books.

Keywords: Study-aid books, Workbooks, Holdings, Public libraries, Low-income families

1 Introduction

Japan is no longer a prosperous country. According to the OECD, its poverty rate stands at 15.7%, making it the 10th highest out of 41 countries [1]. Moreover, Japan's poverty rate for single adult households with at least one child is 48.3%, which is the third highest among the 44 countries listed by the OECD. The only countries with higher rates are Brazil (54.8%) and South Africa (49.8%) [2]. The increase in children from impoverished families is a significant motivation and background for this research. Public libraries should provide resources that can aid in the learning and development of these children.

Various resources can be considered, but this study focuses on study-aid books and workbooks for college and high school entrance examinations. In the past, public libraries tended not to hold them [3][4][5]. However, in recent years, their attitude towards studying for entrance examinations has changed. The installation of study rooms and allowing self-study within libraries are examples. Minei (2018) also states that learning support is currently being implemented in public libraries [6]. Furthermore, Tsuji (2022) states that students from low-income families want the public libraries to have study-aid books and workbooks [7]. Public libraries should serve as repositories of educational resources and ensure students' access to them. However, few studies have clarified the extent to which Japanese public libraries hold study-aid books and workbooks

^{*} University of Tsukuba, Ibaraki, Japan

and what they think about holding such books. With this in mind, a survey was conducted to clarify (1) how many libraries hold how many study-aid books and workbooks and (2) how the libraries with and without books feel.

2 Methods

This study conducted a survey of holdings and a questionnaire survey to clarify the current status of study-aid books and workbooks holdings in public libraries. First, book holdings were surveyed, and then questionnaires were sent to libraries with many holdings and those without holdings. The following section first describes the survey of holdings and then the questionnaire survey.

2.1 Survey of holdings of study-aid books and workbooks for junior high and high school students

2.1.1 *Method of selecting study-aid books and workbooks for junior high and high school students to be surveyed*

In this study, we define “study-aid books and workbooks for junior high and high school students” as books on English, mathematics, Japanese, science, and social studies that junior high and high school students use mainly for high school and university entrance examinations and that authors and publishers created mainly with such usage in mind.

Although such books are the subject of this study, it is difficult to distinguish the above study-aid books and workbooks from millions of other books based on our judgment alone. If there is a list of study-aid books and workbooks commonly used in the field of education, it would be safe and inexpensive to use such a list. But we could not find such a list. Therefore, in this study, we decided to use the recommendations of websites that were hit by searching for “study-aid books and workbooks introduction site (参考書・問題集 紹介サイト)” on Google. The above search returned several hits, but Gakusan.com (<https://www.gakusan.com/>), an online bookstore for study-aid books and workbooks, had the best coverage, and most of the books recommended by the other sites were included in Gakusan.com. Therefore, we chose study-aid books and workbooks from Gakusan.com for this study. Specifically, we first clicked on the subject name in the “For junior high school students” and “For high school students” categories, and extracted the top 10% most popular titles out of all titles displayed as a result of sorting by “popularity.” For example, in the case of study-aid books and workbooks for high school students’ English, we used the top 113 titles out of the 1,124 titles sorted by “popularity” in the search results for “university entrance exams, high school students’ English study-aid books and workbooks” on Gakusan.com.

Incidentally, Gakusan.com has five sorting orders: “by popularity,” “by newest,” “by title,” “by price,” and “by publisher.” In this study, we adopted the “by popularity” sort in order to investigate whether public libraries hold study-aid books and workbooks that are more popular, i.e., in demand by many junior high and high school students. Although it was not clear how “popularity” is determined in Gakusan.com, as there is no description on the website, it does not

seem to deviate greatly from the general popularity, since the study-aid books and workbooks recommended on other websites are generally listed at the top of the list.

The reason for limiting the number of study-aid books and workbooks to the top 10% in “popularity” rather than the entire list is twofold: (1) if we increase the number of study-aid books and workbooks titles subject to investigation, the time required for the holdings survey will become very long, as described later, and (2) conversely, if the number of titles is too small, the results will be unstable. Therefore, we comprehensively judged and set it to the top 10%. As a result, 221 titles for junior high school students and 431 titles for high school students, for a total of 652 sample titles were obtained. The numbers of titles by subjects are shown in Table 1. The data was collected from Gakusan.com on February 7, 2023.

Table 1: The numbers of titles of study-aid books and workbooks investigated

	High School	Junior High School
English	113	66
Mathematics	88	55
Japanese	84	33
Science	70	34
Social Studies	76	33
Total	431	221

2.1.2 Method of investigating the number of study-aid books and workbooks held by public libraries

In this study, we used Calil’s Library API to find out how many study-aid books and workbooks are held by public libraries in Japan [8]. According to the Japan Library Association, 1,394 municipalities (prefectures, cities, wards, towns, and villages) have public libraries in Japan (as of April 1, 2022) [9]. On the other hand, the number of IDs of municipalities that were provided by Calil was 1,479 (as of February 7, 2023). Although the relationship between 1,394 and 1,479 is unclear, this study approximated the latter as the number of municipalities and investigated how many of the 652 titles mentioned above were held by these 1,479 municipalities. The investigation period was from February 7 to 27, 2023 (i.e., it took three weeks for Calil API to search and if we used, for instance, top 20% instead of 10% in Gakusan.com, the time will be doubled). As we will show in detail, the number of libraries that held at least 3 titles was 113 (henceforth, we call them “libraries with study-aid books and workbooks”). The number of libraries that held no title was 893 (similarly, we call them “libraries without study-aid books and workbooks”).

2.2 Questionnaire survey on study-aid books and workbooks holdings for junior high and high school students

We sent surveys electronically to 67 libraries out of the above-mentioned 113 libraries whose e-mail addresses or inquiry forms were found. In other words, we chose only libraries to which we could send questionnaires electronically as our sample, mainly for economic reasons. For

libraries without study-aid books and workbooks, we randomly selected 245 libraries out of the above-mentioned 893 libraries, and sent surveys to 154 libraries whose e-mail addresses or inquiry forms were found.

The questionnaire was created using Questant, a self-administered survey tool developed and operated by Macromill, Inc. Three types of questionnaires were sent to three groups of libraries: those with 6 titles or more, those with 3 to 5 titles, and those with none in their collections. The questionnaires were basically single-choice, but there were also some open-ended questions. The questions are as follows:

- Why do you hold study-aid books and workbooks?
- Do users write more in study-aid books and workbooks than in other books?
- Do study-aid books and workbooks have a shorter life span than other books due to damage or stains?
- Are study-aid books and workbooks lost by users more often than other books?
- Are study-aid books and workbooks more frequently used (checked out, browsed, etc.) than other books?
- What do you do when you receive requests for study-aid books and workbooks?
- How do you select study-aid books and workbooks?
- Do you have study rooms for students?
- Do you cooperate with the children's cafeteria (KODOMO SHOKUDO, i.e. volunteer-run cafeteria in Japan providing free or inexpensive meals to children, etc.), such as loan to groups?
- If you answered "Yes" to the above question, please answer the following. What kind of cooperation do you have?
- Do you provide services other than those with the children's cafeteria, with a view to junior high and high school students from low-income families?
- If you answered "Yes" to the above question, please answer the following. What kind of service, special area, or materials do you provide?
- What kind of cooperation do you have with neighboring school libraries, or would like to have in the future?
- Finally, please feel free to share your opinions about public libraries providing study-aid books and workbooks for junior high and high school students in Japan, where the number of low-income families is increasing.
- Why do not you hold study-aid books and workbooks?

The questionnaire was sent out from March 8th to March 9th, 2023, and responses were accepted until March 25th, 2023.

3 Results

3.1 Results of the holdings survey

The results of the holdings survey are shown in Tables 2 and 3. Table 2 shows that 25 libraries had 6 titles or more, 88 libraries had 3 to 5 titles, and 893 libraries had none. It can be said that the number of libraries with study-aid books and workbooks is relatively small.

Table 3 shows that the library with the largest number of study-aid books and workbooks was Minamisoma City Library, with 43 titles. Toyohashi City Library and OTEPIA Kochi Library were next, with 25 and 24 titles, respectively.

Table 2: The numbers of libraries by the number of titles held

The Numbers of Titles Held	The Numbers of Libraries	Total
43	1	25
25	1	
24	1	
16	1	
15	1	
13	1	
11	2	
10	2	
9	3	
8	3	
7	4	
6	5	
5	17	88
4	25	
3	46	
2	131	473
1	342	
0	893	893
Total	1,479	1,479

Table 3: Top 10 libraries that held many titles

Libraries	The Numbers of Titles Held
Minamisoma City Library in Fukushima	43
Toyohashi City Library in Aichi	25
OTEPIA Kochi Library in Kochi	24
Shirakawa Public Library in Fukushima	16
Yokohama City Library in Kanagawa	15
Kobe City Library in Hyogo	13
Meguro Public Library in Tokyo	11
Osaka Municipal Library in Osaka	11
Narita Public Library in Chiba	10
Yamaga City Library in Kumamoto	10

3.2 Results of the questionnaire survey

The total number of libraries that responded to our survey was 122, of which 18 had 6 titles or more, 44 had 3 to 5 titles, and 60 had none. Henceforth, we will call them as L6+, L3-5, and L0, respectively. Table 4 shows their municipality types.

We can see in Table 4 that, in L6+ and L3-5, there are many prefectural and city libraries, whereas in L0, there are many town and village libraries. Whether or not a library holds study-aid books and workbooks may be related to factors such as the library's size and budget.

Table 4: The numbers of L6+, L3-5, and L0 by municipality types

	Prefecture	City	Ward	Town	Village	Total
L6+	11.1 (2)	61.1 (11)	27.8 (5)	0.0 (0)	0.0 (0)	18
L3-5	4.5 (2)	86.4 (38)	4.5 (2)	4.5 (2)	0.0 (0)	44
L0	5.0 (3)	50.0 (30)	0.0 (0)	38.3 (23)	6.7 (4)	60

3.2.1 Reasons for holding the study-aid books and workbooks

Reasons why L6+ and L3-5 hold study-aid books and workbooks are shown in Table 5 (multiple answers were allowed). The most common reason for holding these books was “Because it is the library’s mission to support users’ learning” in L6+, L3-5, and overall (however, “Others” is excluded). In L6+, both this reason and “Because they are often requested” were tied for first place with 22.2%. It can be said that in these libraries, a relatively large number of them purchase study-aid books and workbooks based on the library’s mission or purpose and user requests. In L3-5, although “Because they are often requested” remained at 9.1%, it ranked third in the order.

Table 5: Response to the question “Why do you hold study-aid books and workbooks?”

Reasons	L6+	L3-5	Total
Because it is the library's mission to support users' learning.	22.2 (4)	20.5 (9)	21.0 (13)
Because they are often requested.	22.2 (4)	9.1 (4)	12.9 (8)
Because it is difficult for junior high and high school students to buy all the necessary study-aid books and workbooks on their own.	16.7 (3)	11.4 (5)	12.9 (8)
Because they are frequently used.	16.7 (3)	9.1 (4)	11.3 (7)
Because there are some RONIN students and adults who cannot use school libraries.	16.7 (3)	6.8 (3)	9.7 (6)
Because the number of poor families and poor children/youth is increasing in Japan.	16.7 (3)	4.5 (2)	8.1 (5)
Because we can increase the number of library users.	11.1 (2)	2.3 (1)	4.8 (3)
Because there are some students who do not want to use school libraries even though they can use them.	11.1 (2)	2.3 (1)	4.8 (3)
Because we want users to use them in our study rooms.	0.0 (0)	6.8 (3)	4.8 (3)
Because they do not become burden on the budget very much.	11.1 (2)	0.0 (0)	3.2 (2)
Because school libraries in the neighborhood do not have many study-aid books and workbooks.	5.6 (1)	0.0 (0)	1.6 (1)
Because they do not take up space on the shelves very much.	5.6 (1)	0.0 (0)	1.6 (1)
Because public libraries in the neighborhood have them.	0.0 (0)	0.0 (0)	0.0 (0)
Others	66.7 (12)	77.3 (34)	74.2 (46)

3.2.2 Writing

Table 6 shows whether library users in L6+ and L3-5 wrote more in the study-aid books and workbooks than in other books. When we asked libraries to cooperate in the survey, 6 (33.3%) of the L6+ and 13 (29.5%) of the L3-5 asked us to tell them the titles of the study-aid books and workbooks that we thought they had in their collections. These libraries might have responded to the question about the writing (and also stains, frequency of use, etc., which we will mention later) in the study-aid books and workbooks based on the titles we told. In that sense, their answers might be reliable.

The most common answer was “No different from other books” (41.9%). Although two libraries answered “More than other books,” one library answered “Less than other books.” Thus, the amount of writing in the study-aid books and workbooks may not be much different from that in other books.

Table 6: Response to the question “Do users write more in study-aid books and workbooks than in other books?”

	Very less than other books	Less than other books	No different from other	More than other books	Much more than other books	We do not know	Others	Total
L6+	0.0 (0)	5.6 (1)	50.0 (9)	0.0 (0)	0.0 (0)	16.7 (3)	27.8 (5)	18
L3-5	0.0 (0)	0.0 (0)	38.6 (17)	4.5 (2)	0.0 (0)	40.9 (18)	15.9 (7)	44
Total	0.0 (0)	1.6 (1)	41.9 (26)	3.2 (2)	0.0 (0)	33.9 (21)	19.4 (12)	62

3.2.3 Lifespan due to damage or stain

Table 7 shows whether the lifespan of study-aid books and workbooks is shorter compared to other books due to damage or stain. Overall, the response “No different from other books” was the most common (43.5%). Although one library answered “Shorter than other books,” two libraries answered “Longer than other books.” Thus, the lifespan of the study-aid books and workbooks may not be much different from that of other books.

Table 7: Response to the question “Do study-aid books and workbooks have a shorter life span than other books due to damage or stains?”

	Very longer than other books	Longer than other books	No different from other books	Shorter than other books	Very shorter than other books	We do not know	Others	Total
L6+	0.0 (0)	5.6 (1)	55.6 (10)	0.0 (0)	0.0 (0)	16.7 (3)	22.2 (4)	18
L3-5	0.0 (0)	2.3 (1)	38.6 (17)	2.3 (1)	0.0 (0)	45.5 (20)	11.4 (5)	44
Total	0.0 (0)	3.2 (2)	43.5 (27)	1.6 (1)	0.0 (0)	37.1 (23)	14.5 (9)	62

3.2.4 Loss

Table 8 shows whether study-aid books and workbooks are lost more than other books. Overall, the response “No different from other books” was the most common (41.9%). Although one library answered “More than other books,” one library answered “Very less than other books.” Thus, the loss of the study-aid books and workbooks may not be much different from that of other books.

Table 8: Response to the question “Are study-aid books and workbooks lost by users more often than other books?”

	Very less than other books	Less than other books	No different from other books	More than other books	Much more than other books	We do not know	Others	Total
L6+	5.6 (1)	0.0 (0)	55.6 (10)	0.0 (0)	0.0 (0)	16.7 (3)	22.2 (4)	18
L3-5	0.0 (0)	0.0 (0)	36.4 (16)	2.3 (1)	0.0 (0)	45.5 (20)	15.9 (7)	44
Total	1.6 (1)	0.0 (0)	41.9 (26)	1.6 (1)	0.0 (0)	37.1 (23)	17.7 (11)	62

3.2.5 Frequency of use

Table 9 shows the frequency of use of study-aid books and workbooks compared to other books. Overall, the most common response was “We do not know” (45.2%), followed by “No different from other books” (33.9%).

Table 9: Response to the question “Are study-aid books and workbooks more frequently used (checked out, browsed, etc.) than other books?”

	Much more than other books	More than other books	No different from other books	Less than other books	Very less than other books	We do not know	Others	Total
L6+	0.0 (0)	5.6 (1)	33.3 (6)	0.0 (0)	0.0 (0)	33.3 (6)	27.8 (5)	18
L3-5	0.0 (0)	0.0 (0)	34.1 (15)	4.5 (2)	0.0 (0)	50.0 (22)	11.4 (5)	44
Total	0.0 (0)	1.6 (1)	33.9 (21)	3.2 (2)	0.0 (0)	45.2 (28)	16.1 (10)	62

3.2.6 Response to requests (purchase requests)

Table 10 shows how the libraries respond to purchase requests for study-aid books and workbooks. Only one L6+ library (5.6%) answered “Basically, we purchase them.” However, as we saw in Table 5, 22.2% of L6+ and 9.1% of L3-5 selected “Because they are often requested” as the reason for holding study-aid books and workbooks. As we will see in Table 11, many libraries selected “We purchase requested books” as one of the methods of book selection. These indicate that the user’s request, though initially declined, may be documented and considered again during the book selection process and subsequently purchased.

Table 10: Response to the question “What do you do when you receive requests for study-aid books and workbooks?”

	Basically, we purchase them	Basically, we decline the request	Others	Total
L6+	5.6 (1)	44.4 (8)	50.0 (9)	18
L3-5	0.0 (0)	77.3 (34)	22.7 (10)	44
Total	1.6 (1)	67.7 (42)	30.6 (19)	62

3.2.7 Methods of book selection

Table 11 shows the selection method of study-aid books and workbooks (multiple answers were allowed). The most common (excluding “Others”) for overall was “We select books by using approval system with bookstores” (21.0%). The next most common was “We purchase requested books” (19.4%). As for the request, the tendency is different between L6+ and L3-5, with only 9.1% of L3-5 chose this option, while 44.4% of L6+ chose this. This tendency is similar to that observed in Table 5.

Table 11: Response to the question “How do you select study-aid books and workbooks?”

	We select books by using approval system with bookstores	We purchase requested books	We select books recommended by book distributors such as TRC	We select books with good reputations in online bookstores such as Amazon and Gakusan.com	We do not know	Others
L6+	27.8 (5)	44.4 (8)	11.1 (2)	11.1 (2)	0.0 (0)	66.7 (12)
L3-5	18.2 (8)	9.1 (4)	13.6 (6)	6.8 (3)	6.8 (3)	75.0 (33)
Total	21.0 (13)	19.4 (12)	12.9 (8)	8.1 (5)	4.8 (3)	72.6 (45)

3.2.8 Reasons for not having study-aid books and workbooks

Table 12 shows the reasons why L0 does not hold study-aid books and workbooks (multiple answers were allowed). The most common reason was “Because they are likely to be written in more than other books,” which was selected by about half of the libraries (46.7%). However, according to L6+ and L3-5, writing in study-aid books and workbooks is not more common than in other books as mentioned earlier. L0 may not need to fear writing so much.

Table 12: Response to the question “Why do not you hold study-aid books and workbooks?”

Reasons	L0
Because they are likely to be written in more than other books.	46.7 (28)
Because they will be burden on the budget.	28.3 (17)
Because they are likely to be damaged or stained more quickly than other books.	26.7 (16)
Because they will take up space on the shelves.	23.3 (14)
Because CHUSHO Report recommends not to provide them.	15.0 (9)
Because students can study better if they buy study-aid books and workbooks by themselves.	13.3 (8)
Because study-aid books and workbooks are not so expensive and can be purchased by individuals.	8.3 (5)
Because there are no requests.	8.3 (5)
Because we want students to use study-aid books and workbooks held in school libraries.	6.7 (4)
Because we want school library to have them first if it does not have them.	5.0 (3)
Because we want RONIN students and adults to buy study-aid books and workbooks by themselves even if they cannot use school libraries.	5.0 (3)
Because they are probably not used.	1.7 (1)
Because many students will come to the library and occupy the reading room.	1.7 (1)
Because we prohibit study in our library and it is difficult to draw a line between browsing and	1.7 (1)
Because we used to provide study-aid books and workbooks, but they were rarely used.	0.0 (0)
Because we used to have study-aid books and workbooks, but there were complaints from non-student users.	0.0 (0)
Others	56.7 (34)

3.2.9 Services with a view to junior high and high school students from low-income families

Table 13 shows whether the respondents provide services to junior high and high school students from low-income families, in cooperation with children's cafeterias (KODOMO SHOKUDO, i.e., volunteer-run cafeteria in Japan providing free or inexpensive meals to children, etc.). The 13 libraries (two L6+, six L3-5, and five L0) answered "Yes." They were then asked an open-ended question what kind of cooperation they provide. The answers were (1) reading aloud to children, (2) loan to groups, and (3) book mobile (BM).

Table 13: Response to the question "Do you cooperate with the children's cafeteria, such as loan to groups?"

	Yes, we do.	No, we do not.	Not at present, but we are	Total
L6+	11.1 (2)	88.9 (16)	0.0 (0)	18
L3-5	13.6 (6)	86.4 (38)	0.0 (0)	44
L0	8.3 (5)	88.3 (53)	3.3 (2)	60

Table 14 shows whether the respondents provide services to junior high and high school students from low-income families, other than in cooperation with children's cafeterias. The number of libraries that answered "Yes" was small, with only four libraries (one L6+, one L3-5, and two L0). All of the specific services provided were related to providing information resources.

Table 14: Response to the question "Do you provide services other than those with the children's cafeteria, with a view to junior high and high school students from low-income families?"

	Yes, we do.	No, we do not.	Not at present, but we are	Total
L6+	11.1 (2)	88.9 (16)	0.0 (0)	18
L3-5	13.6 (6)	86.4 (38)	0.0 (0)	44
L0	8.3 (5)	88.3 (53)	3.3 (2)	60

3.2.10 Cooperation with school libraries

The responses to an open-ended question "What kind of cooperation do you have with neighboring school libraries, or would like to have in the future?" were as follows. First of all, the most

common was loan to groups. 14 libraries in L6+ (77.8%), 30 libraries in L3-5 (68.2%), and 33 libraries in L0 (55.0%) referred to this. There was also an answer stating that “The same system is used in both school and public libraries, which can be searched by each other and borrowed from each other.”

One L0 library provided the following response: “We are making use of each other’s collections with limited budgets. We are planning to focus on certification exams (English, Chinese characters, mathematics), and would like to start by gathering study-aid books and workbooks for that purpose.” It is possible that some libraries that did not have study-aid books and workbooks in their collections may start to offer them in the future.

3.2.11 Comments from L6+ libraries

We asked L6+ only, “Please feel free to give us your opinions about public libraries providing study-aid books and workbooks for junior high and high school students in Japan, where the number of low-income families is increasing.” The followings are some excerpts from the responses: “Providing all citizens, including those from low-income households, with the opportunity to obtain information from study-aid books and workbooks is a meaningful activity for public libraries,” “If there is a high demand for study-aid books and workbooks, public libraries could provide them to some extent.” In addition, there were positive opinions on the library’s holdings of study-aid books and workbooks, such as “If we provide study-aid books and workbooks to young people who have the motivation to learn, but cannot afford to purchase the books due to economic issues or are unable to go to school due to various reasons, they can study with peace of mind” and “Our city is now working on to support single-parent households, and it is important to provide opportunities for learning to junior high and high school students at the library.” This is exactly what the focus of this study is on, as students from low-income families need support in their education.

4 Conclusions

In this study, we surveyed the holdings of study-aid books and workbooks in Japanese public libraries and conducted a questionnaire survey. The results revealed that while there were 113 libraries that held at least 3 titles, and 25 libraries that held at least 6 titles, there were 893 libraries that do not hold a single title. It can be said that the number of libraries with study-aid books and workbooks is relatively small. The questionnaire survey showed that L0 are most concerned about “writing,” but according to L6+ and L3-5, writing is no different from other books, and damage and loss are also no different from other books.

Future tasks include: (1) surveying the extent to which school libraries hold and provide study-aid books and workbooks, and (2) clarifying whether there are differences by media, such as electronic books and paper materials. We would like to further clarify the obstacles for public libraries to hold study-aid books and workbooks, and then explore ways to support students to learn in public libraries.

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