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## A Case Study of Second Language Acquisition: A Case Study of English Home Education Model for Children in China

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### Abstract

This study reconfirms the second language acquisition theory that there is a "critical period" in children's language development and cultivation in terms of age and cognition and the advantages of bilingual education. In the Chinese language environment, early childhood English education should adhere to the purpose of communication, take life scenes as the main content, under the guidance of the relevant theories of second language acquisition, complete coverage of basic sentence patterns and phonetic symbols, and select excellent audio-visual materials and textbooks suitable for children's physical and mental development. Only in this way can the process of language acquisition be simulated to the maximum extent and at the minimum cost. Therefore, it is essential that parents and teachers strive to create a highly simulated good English application environment. This case study of English family education model for children has a good enlightenment on English education in Kindergarten and primary school in China.

**Keywords:** Second Language Acquisition, English For Children, English Education, A Case Study.

### Introduce

Relevant statistics show that After China became a member of the World Trade Organization (WTO) On December 11, 2001, English education has received unprecedented attention in mainland China. In order to cultivate talents with international competitiveness, English learning is showing a trend of younger age, and the phenomenon of kindergarten spread is very common. In mainland China, English education from early childhood has been put on the agenda of almost most parents and even grandparents. After the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) came into force on January 1, 2022, English education became even more urgent for Chinese parents. So how to help Chinese families in the current new economic environment, better implementation of early childhood English education plan is increasingly protruding.

As an English educator and tutor, I will make some observations, comparisons and reflections in the aspect of early childhood English education. This paper focuses on two

aspects: students' subjective cognitive ability, teaching techniques and textbooks. In terms of students' subjective cognitive ability: when children learn as students, the characteristics of abstract thinking and concrete thinking refer to students' subjective ability to use words and make sentences; Students' enthusiasm for learning foreign languages and proficiency in mastering their mother tongue refer to the degree to which mother tongue interferes with foreign language learning. Can students master the pronunciation skills of foreign language (English) accurately. In teaching technology and teaching materials: video teaching materials and cartoons are very effective teaching approaches. Because it can demonstrate correct pronunciation, kindle students' interest in learning, expand the use of common vocabulary and scenarios. Therefore, the learning characteristics and process of a brother and sister are objectively observed and recorded, and some rules of infant English acquisition are understood, in order to communicate with peers and social people who care about infant English education.

### Literature Review

Linguists and foreign language educators have long focused on how children learn their mother tongue and how children learn a foreign language (mainly English in mainland China), and whether there are similarities between the two. Around this topic, scholars at home and abroad have done relevant research.

#### (1) Foreign studies on second language acquisition in early childhood

Ren Lingling (2014) mentioned that from the perspective of the research path, first, the best age for children to acquire a second language in the early stage: Benjamin S. Bloom proposed the world famous curve of children's intelligence development in 1964, believing that children develop 50% at the age of 4 and their intelligence has reached 80% of the adult level at about the age of 8. This classic judgment has an important impact on the theory and practice of preschool education and basic education. For example, Chinese children generally start to teach cultural knowledge in the middle class of kindergarten (children are usually about 4 years old at this time), and children receive primary education from the age of 7 or 8. This is in good agreement with the nodes proposed by the early childhood intelligence development curve at around 4 and 8 years of age. The second approach is to study the influence of second language acquisition on children's cognitive development. Among the experimental studies on second language acquisition and cognitive development in early childhood, Peal and Lambert, a Canadian scholar, made a famous study in 1962. The bilingual and monolingual groups were tested on vocabulary and lexis tests, and the results showed that the bilingual group was superior to the monolingual group on both verbal and nonverbal intelligence tests and had a more diverse intelligence structure (1962:1-23). Experimental studies have shown that learning a second language at an early age can improve children's language development and cognitive abilities (Ren & Zhang, 2014).

#### (2) The status quo and trend analysis of the research on English education for infants in China

Shi Qimeng (2019) points out that the specific contents of the research articles on Chinese preschool English education mainly focus on the current situation of English teachers in kindergartens, knowledge base, teaching ability and professional awareness. At present, the main trend of the research on English for children in China is the research on English teaching in kindergartens and English teachers. The latest research trend is to focus on the integration of media technology and English teaching for children, and on the whole, pay more attention to the practical aspects of English education for children. On the whole, studies pay more

attention to how to teach English to young children, but there are few studies on English acquisition of Chinese children, ignoring the study of personality differences, cognitive characteristics, psychological characteristics and emotional factors of learners (Shi & Zhang, 2019).

Chuanjiang Li (2018), relying on fNIRS brain imaging technology, combined traditional educational surveys with emerging brain science methods to explore the basic question "the impact of bilingual learning on children's executive function development and brain development". From the perspective of pedagogy, psychology and brain science, it is found that preschool bilingual learning is beneficial to individual cognitive development, and the formation of bilingual brain comes from the selection and control mechanism of bilingualism. The value of this double-edged sword for children's language learning and bilingual brain shaping can be brought into full play only when the restriction factors of multimedia resource use and children's cognitive load are controlled. This provides a preliminary response to the concerns of all sectors of society about whether children should learn English and how to learn English, and adds a new empirical basis to the international academic research on "language experience shapes the brain". It is of construction significance to enrich the basic research of preschool children's bilingual learning and development and the applied research of preschool bilingual education in China. In terms of research methods, it preliminarily explores the interdisciplinary thinking of studying preschool education (Li, 2018).

### **Methodology**

Family English education for children is characterized by the stability of learning environment, randomness of learning time, entertainment of learning atmosphere, flexibility of methods and affinity of children's acceptance psychology. As long as the correct educational principles are followed, good results can be achieved.

According to the author's own practical experience in Learning English, children's own language development stage and thinking characteristics, combined with the actual life needs of the observed objects, referring to language development theory, on the basis of not formulating a complete education plan, the author adopts open observation to dynamically guide children to learn oral English. Observe and record children's actual language changes. The study was conducted over a 12-month period.

#### (1) Introduction to research objects:

David, who was born in August 2014, and Sophia, who was born in February 2018, are cared for by their grandmother, who speak Mandarin with a northern accent.

Children live with their parents, and the father goes out early and comes home late. The language father speaks with the child is Mandarin. The mother's English pronunciation is quite standard. And she is very busy with her work and rarely spends time with her children (except during lactation). David went to kindergarten at the age of four (September 2017 -- December 2019) and entered the first grade in September 2020. He lived in the school at noon and offered English classes (one class per week) in the first grade. Sophia is not in kindergarten yet. From birth to the present, the brother and sister have acquired English as a result of family education.

After analyzing that the brother and sister live in a Chinese language environment and are impatient, the researcher focuses on the verbal communication ability of the two of them in spoken Chinese, and exercises oral English and listening ability on this basis to get the understanding of parents. When the child is in a happy mood, communicate with the child in English, listen to the story, explain the meaning of the story with Chinese translation. David

can read and write Chinese characters, while Sophia cannot read Chinese characters, but can already read Pinyin correctly..

#### (2) Objectives of Early childhood English education.

First is to insist that early childhood English education starts from correct pronunciation. From the point of view of linguistics, phonology is primary and fundamental compared with vocabulary and grammar. The cultivation of correct pronunciation comes from a lot of listening and speaking exercises. Only by learning pronunciation can the language materials learned be stored in the brain in the correct form and reproduced in the correct form, so as to strengthen the feeling of language, master grammar and vocabulary most effectively, and improve the actual use ability. Preschool English education should be guided by "key hypothesis period" and language cognitive ability. Phonology, vocabulary and sentence were used as monitoring criteria. The goal of language development is to retell life scenes.

Second, mobilize students' enthusiasm for learning English. For children, interest is the first power of learning, successful interest cultivation is a good beginning to learn English. Therefore, stimulating children's interest in learning English should be the primary and basic goal of early childhood English education. As long as children's interest in English learning is stimulated, the effect of English education can be improved, the burden of learning can be reduced, and the fear and mystery of learning English can be broken. Starting foreign language training from listening and speaking conforms to the rules of language learning as well as the physiological and psychological characteristics of children (Zhong, 2005). Cultivating interest in English, emphasizing listening and speaking, listening as the main, speaking as the auxiliary, understand daily conversation, roughly understand children's English stories in books, have simple English imitation ability, can respond in simple English.

Third, the teaching content should be consistent with the law of children's intellectual development curve. The children's intellectual development curve proposed by Benjamin S. Bloom shows the mental development characteristics of children in different age groups. This is also reflected in the author's actual teaching. Young children (4 years old) to repeat the main form of learning, the content should be simple and intuitive, strong sense of rhythm. Students can learn simple children's songs to develop the habit of accurate pronunciation. Seven-year-old children can gradually contact some abstract vocabulary, expand the content and scope of students' learning. Do it in accordance with the children's intellectual development.

Fourth, using multimedia teaching methods to correctly "induce" students to make continuous progress in foreign language learning. The video teaching materials and animations suitable for children's physical and mental characteristics are very powerful. Because it can give students correct pronunciation, accurate use of words and sentences, understand profound abstract knowledge, stimulate the enthusiasm of exploring the unknown world at the same time mobilize, receive other traditional teaching methods difficult to achieve the teaching effect.

#### (3) Research design

English education tasks should achieve three full coverage: full coverage of 48 English pronunciation, full coverage of five Basic English sentence patterns and full coverage of high-frequency English life scenes. The course materials are mainly from English textbooks recommended by the Ministry of Education and original English videos and cartoons on the Internet. The teaching method is reading text and Chinese translation. The test methods are scene description, Chinese-English translation and reciting texts.

#### (4) Teaching methods



The teaching method is to use simple English pronunciation repetition of the teaching method + necessary mother tongue explanation. Specifically speaking, one is that teachers should tell stories close to children's lives. Adhere to the guiding principle of teaching content in life, telling stories as the main teaching method, choose easy to understand and popular teaching materials closely combined with life. The second is that students and teachers repeat the story until the children can use it freely in the life scene again. Under the principle of English education content in daily life, students and teachers should first get familiar with "theoretical" (written) knowledge, get familiar with scene vocabulary and common sentence patterns by telling stories and listening to stories, and then actually reproduce the content in the previous stories in the living environment, repeatedly use high-frequency vocabulary to deepen understanding and memory. Finally, by watching easy cartoons and other video files, students and teachers can see how children in the English world communicate in English from the perspective of "spectator" or "observer".

### Findings

First is the speculation about the dividing line between the age of mother language acquisition (3 years old) and the age of second language acquisition (7 years old). Brother David (7 years old) can translate English and Chinese easily after learning five basic sentence structures. In contrast, the younger sister (3 years old) can only understand, but cannot translate. The reason is simple, Sophia's spoken Chinese is not perfect or is in the process of building up, compared to her brother. In many cases, Sophia relied on others (her brother and parents, teachers) for stories. But the older brother had a significantly better grasp of basic Chinese and English sentence structures in Mandarin. Conclusion: David's brain is more abstract, while his sister's comprehension is specific, unidirectional, and unstable. Therefore, three-year-old children should adhere to the similar education method of learning their mother tongue -- intuitive and repetitive learning, while seven-year-old children should gradually adjust their teaching emphasis to the direction of adult abstract thinking.

Second, children's age (between 3-7 years old) begins to show a positive correlation with foreign language learning inertia. Children's mother tongue system has not been completely established (especially written language), so they are less affected by the interference of mother tongue in second language acquisition, and are more likely to learn standard language and idiomatic spoken English. This is also verified by actual observation. For example, brother David has strong Chinese reading and writing ability, compared with his sister Sophia, so his enthusiasm for Learning English is obviously lower than that of her sister Sophia. This is what happens when mother tongue interferes. But after David was in a happy mood and received recognition and encouragement, his enthusiasm for Learning English was immediately ignited.

Three is children (between 3-7 years old) English pronunciation is accurate, and can distinguish the wrong word pronunciation. Use the Reading A-Z textbook. Focus on training David's English listening, speaking and reading ability to ensure accurate pronunciation. At the same time, the new concept of English I, as a long recitation textbook. For example, Lesson 25, Mrs Smith's Kitchen. Read and translate the Chinese sentences to David in advance. Then have David read aloud to himself until he can recite the whole text. Note that audio teaching was not used in this process, which mainly relied on the direct recitation of the researcher himself. During this period, David also found some problems of non-standard pronunciation of the teacher. The reason is that the teacher is too old when learning English pronunciation and is obviously affected by the pronunciation of mother tongue. David, on the

other hand, received English early and paid attention to accurate pronunciation and the difference with Chinese pronunciation. At the beginning, the student was afraid of difficulties, but with encouragement, David finished the task quickly. His self-confidence was greatly enhanced.

Fourth, children's imitation and perception of video (animation) is mainly reflected in the immersive feeling of characters and scenes and repeated quotation and practice of relevant lines. For example, when the Peppa Pig cartoon is played, one episode is about 5-6 minutes, and David has the impulse of subjective imitation after watching it for about a day or two hours. These are all advantages that other teaching methods do not have. The researchers also found that children aged 5 and 6, whose verbal communication skills are not so strong, are often able to "recite" their favorite cartoons almost verbatim, although they sometimes cannot understand the meaning of certain languages. David's cousin Lulu, for example, has this ability when watching Chinese cartoons. This language skill is relatively easy to acquire, first of all because children communicate with the outside world mainly through listening and speaking. Secondly, children in this period are in a sensitive period of language development. In the process of children watching cartoons, the language in the cartoons also unknowingly enters into their audio-visual sense. To tell a negative example, in the anti-Japanese theme "tube warfare", David (7 years old) saw the Japanese invaders beaten when Chinese residents is very afraid, even if parents reminded him, the act was not true, but he was also very nervous and scared, greatly was shortness of breath becomes one of the most obvious performance, look very panic and nervous. In this process, it is clear that language, video and other sound effects enhance the effect of children's emotional perception. This shows that children's understanding of cartoons is not based on the language in the cartoons. On the contrary, children feel the contents of cartoons strongly through their preschool life experience and existing cognitive structure, which sets the context for their further language learning. In audiovisual, language is secondary. However, by repeatedly playing cartoons, some children can retell some English dialogues in relevant situations. Although they cannot translate them into Chinese exactly, learners have formed a certain context.

## Discussions

(1) Teaching children's English in daily life.

The existence of children's life almost completely depends on adults, the younger the age, education and life is more closely related. Chinese educators Tao Xingzhi and Chen Heqin advocated life education, paying special attention to the life of education, and selecting teaching content from life experience, so that children can feel kind, natural, full of human kindness, adapt to life, gain experience and gain development (Sheng, 2002). Therefore, the purpose of persisting in learning English is to use it in real life and make the language come alive, not just the cold symbols in the textbooks. Only in this way can we maximize the motivation of children to use spoken English, gradually cultivate their interest in Learning English, and finally establish their own language learning confidence.

Drawing a picture of a complete life is the primary purpose of children's English education. The hero of this picture is the child oneself, to show the whole world from the child's perspective, his or her world, his or her family life members, his or her community life content. Adhere to the path of English education life is the most effective compared with other Methods of English learning, give children a feeling of direct communication and dialogue with children of the same age, very attractive. The "oil painting" that reflects the

teaching content of life includes four elements: the protagonist is the child oneself, the child's family members, the child's partners and schools, and the child's life circle or community.

The first is the family and the child's own relevant life content. Children become familiar with their family members through their communication and know themselves through the words of family members. In the comparison, children know the basic image characteristics of words such as age, male and female, tall and short, fat and thin, black and white. They find their own hobbies, find their own partners, good friends, establish their own friendship, the formation of the first likes and dislikes, values get the first emerge in mind. In addition, to the people around the occupation, personality, temper, habits and so on have a gradual understanding. These constitute a child's first circle of life. Each of these can be expanded into a specific research topic.

The second is children's own kindergarten, primary school or their own circle of friends. In the communication with peers, gradually cut into the society. Socializing extends far beyond the circle of family life. More time is spent on books, games and various sports. There are also teachers and other staff to deal with. Children are exposed to more strangers and more information. All of these require students to gradually adapt to the new social life. In this process, the teaching content and vocabulary were expanded for the first time.

Third, the children's living radius outside the home and school constitutes the community life circle. Community life circle is the functional circle of life. Together with the academic circle of the school, it constitutes the first level of language cognition of children or the first universe, or the first universe of spoken language, the meta-universe. Therefore, the life content of the community can include games and entertainment places, various functional facilities, etc. In addition, there is a larger social environment, can become the content of children's teaching.

Researchers use life as education content, communicate with children in English, use real life scenes, lead children to know his living environment, so that English becomes the second language of teachers and students. Repeat the basic five sentence patterns. You are a student. The rabbit is a toy, and it is a classmate. Sophia will automatically ask, Where is its mother? The author will take the opportunity to turn into the third person narrative to describe Sophia. I would say, Her mother is working at company. Or if you're playing outdoors, This is the sky. This is the land. We are human. There are three basic elements in our Chinese culture. The flower is colour. These trees are green. When you wash your face, tell the child, This is tap water. That is soap. Water is in the basin. The mirror is on the wall. We use soap clean our hands. We use towel wipe our hands. These scenarios can simulate and reproduce the daily life of people in english-speaking countries and regions, deepen the connections between pronunciation, vocabulary, sentence patterns and scenes in children's brain, and improve language development and cognitive ability. These studies have been validated in Chuanjiang Li (2018) the effect of bilingual learning on Executive Function in preschool children: A Study based on fNIRS Brain Imaging Technology.

#### (2) Teaching methods of Early childhood English education

Children are very interested in stories. By listening to stories and telling stories, children can improve their mother tongue learning. Learning spoken English is no exception. Captivating stories seem to solve the problem of motivation in one fell swoop. Language difficulties are overcome by the ability to understand meaning without understanding the words, and by the natural and pleasant repetition of many words in stories (Wright, 1998)

Current teaching materials are purchased online after consultation with parents. There are many pictures in Reading A-Z, which the children like very much, especially Sophia. She



liked color very much and sometimes copied pictures in her books with colored pens. The older brother David is now able to read this kind of book by himself. If he encounters a word that he does not know, he can refer to the Chinese translation of the guide book and learn it by himself. "ISTANBUL" is now LEVEL I, book 40. For example, the first volume of New Concept English, which David thought was difficult, was introduced by the researchers and then translated to the students sentence by sentence. And then let the students learn. This approach is mainly aimed at the complex language materials in storybooks.

### (3) Selection of specific teaching materials

The language environment in childhood is crucial to their language learning. It is the responsibility of a researcher to create an appropriate English language environment. In the Chinese environment, oral English communication opportunities are few, very easy to forget. Therefore, it is particularly necessary to create a miniature imitation English environment. At this time, China's developed Internet communication infrastructure and large-scale smartphone app and content providers provide the necessary technical support and near-zero cost for this purpose. For example, after reading the book explanation of Peppa Pig, the child has mastered the story outline. When the plot is shown in the form of animation, children will often be immersed in the story, and the characters in the story together, the visual and auditory can get a full feeling.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

### Conclusions

The findings of this study once again validate the theory of second language acquisition related to the "critical hypothesis period" and the cognitive ability of language development. Specifically, it includes the following four aspects: In terms of pronunciation: children at the age of 3 to 7 can correctly master pronunciation skills when learning a foreign language, which is better than adults' foreign language pronunciation. In terms of the development of thinking consciousness, children aged from 3 to 7 show a "watershed" between concrete thinking and abstract thinking when learning foreign languages. This is particularly prominent in the selection of words and sentences. Older children show the mental awareness of monitoring language, but three-year-old children are difficult to easily "navigate" the "ship" of information. In terms of mother tongue interference in second language acquisition: when children aged from 3 to 7 are learning foreign languages, the inertia in foreign language learning of children aged 7 has developed to the point that cannot be ignored, and gradually has a trend of strengthening. Teachers must "coax" children as young as seven into learning a foreign language by finding ways to fire them up. In terms of teaching technology: video teaching, or watching cartoons, has incomparable advantages over traditional teaching methods in learning foreign languages for children aged from 3 to 7. This is mainly reflected in the experience of the scene and the feeling of the meaning of the sentence. The conclusion of this study once again verifies the relevant foreign language teaching theories of scholars at home and abroad. For example, the "critical period hypothesis" of language acquisition and bilingual education can promote children's brain development and play a positive role in improving children's language development and cognitive ability.

The process of acquiring a second language takes place under the subjective intervention of the researcher, while the acquisition of mother tongue is a natural generative process. Therefore, the quality of SECOND language acquisition directly depends on the ability of researchers or teachers to simulate the natural process of first language acquisition. For example, the pure imitation stage mentioned in the article (learning a foreign language at the

age of 3) and the "independent development stage" (learning a foreign language at the age of 7) are common characteristics of children's physical and psychological development at different ages. According to the results of relevant psychological research, providing students with appropriate textbooks and teaching content is the key to Chinese children's second language acquisition.

### Recommendations

Children's parents should do the following in oral English education:

First, the ultimate purpose of spoken English is to communicate information. The purpose of language is communication, and in the spoken stage it is sound and meaning. This is obviously different from the school's exam-oriented English education, also known as dumb English, will only answer questions, will not be applied to life. Second, oral English detection is based on pronunciation, vocabulary and sentences. Despite its exam-oriented characteristics, In the context of Mandarin as a language, Chinese students have to use standard means when learning a foreign language, because there is a lack of English language environment.

Third, the expression of spoken English takes life scenes as the main content. This is to realize the ultimate goal of learning to use -- abandon the exam-oriented education with examination paper as the core.

Fourth, oral English teaching materials should be recommended by the country and original cartoons and other videos. In this way, It is beneficial for Chinese students to gradually transition from the Chinese language and culture background to the language and culture background of other countries where English is the mother tongue, so that children can have a more accurate and deeper understanding of the differences between cultures.

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