Exploring the Influence of Parents on Second Language Acquisition
In 2-6-year-old Children based on SCT

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ABSTRACT
Under the current test-oriented education background in China, many parents pay the most attention to their children's test scores, so they tend to apply for test-oriented courses, which ignores their children's English ability long-term developments. We believe it is important to promote acquisition based on foreign language courses to children aged 2-6, so students can learn foreign languages as if they were their mother tongue. Compared with "learning", the acquisition method of foreign language learning is a teaching method. Because acquisition is more logical and effective than learning a second language, learning a second language is also a common problem faced by students. It is important for parents to be aware of this learning model, as they have a significant influence on students' outcomes, fees, and willingness to place it above 'acquired' and 'traditional learning'. To this end, we designed a questionnaire to investigate the parents of children aged 2-6 on their understanding and attitude towards the acquisition learning style and analyzed the survey results, hoping to find the possibility and realistic way to promote the acquisition teaching.

Keywords: The influence of parents on SLA, Children, SCT.

1. INTRODUCTION

The acquisition method of learning a foreign language is a way of teaching compared to "learning." The acquisition is a more logical and effective approach than learning when it comes to the second language, and studying a second language is also a universal problem for students. Parents need to recognize this learning mode, as they have important influences on students' learning outcomes, their tuition fees and their willingness to favor it over "acquisition" and "the traditional learning."

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Second Language Acquisition

The history of the study of SLA spans less than fifty years, but the field already exhibits signs of disintegration [1]. Larsen-Freeman and Long state that "at least forty 'theories' of SLA have been proposed" [2]. Processability Theory explains acquisition processes [3]. The Interaction Hypothesis explains the way that interaction triggers the mental processes involved in acquisition [4]. Usage-based theories by Ellis provides a convincing account of how development arises from input/interaction [5]. The theoretical approaches that have been used fall into three broad categories. Chomsky states that every human being is biologically endowed with a language faculty, the language acquisition device responsible for the initial state of language development, which is called The Universal Grammar (UG) Approach [6]. The Cognitive model claims that language learning is no different from other types of learning and is the result of the human brain building up networks of associations based on input [7]. In contrast to UG and Cognitive models, the Sociocultural Theory (SCT) claims that language learning is a socially mediated process. As highlighted by Mitchell and Myles, "from a social-cultural perspective, children's early language learning arises from processes of meaning-making in collaborative activity with other members

of a given culture" [6, 8].

2.2. Language Acquisition and Language Learning

Krashen argues that learning is the conscious process of studying and intellectually understanding grammar [9]. On the other hand, acquisition refers to the unconscious absorption of general principles of grammar through real-life experiences of communication [9]. It is the basis for most first language ability and is commonly known as "picking up a language" [9]. More recently, Hoque suggests that language learning is not an age-appropriate activity for very young children as learning presupposes those learners have a conscious knowledge of the new language and can talk about that knowledge [10]. Also, Krashen argues that only acquisition is possible for children [9]. Thus, Fathman, Hale and Budar state that if children have access to enriched intake environments, extra classes in second languages are unnecessary [11, 12]. These studies contribute towards a better understanding of differences between acquisition and learning.

2.3. The Sociocultural Theory

To be more specific, the sociocultural theory is one of the second language acquisition theories. The sociocultural theory, initially proposed by Vygotsky, explains human's learning and cognitive development, including both adults and peers on the learning process [13-15]. Later, many researchers extended Vygotsky's theory. Donato shows language learning as a social process [16]. His study concluded that meaning is created through collaboration. The studies of Lantolf and Swain indicate the usefulness of peer interaction [17, 18]. Similarly, Anning holds the view that the environment can have an influence on the capacities of children in their learning process [19]. Thorne argues that "while human neurobiology is a necessary condition for higher-order thinking, the most important forms of human cognitive activity develop through interaction within social and material environments" [20]. Such cultural and linguistic settings include family life, peer groups, schoolings, and organized sports activities, etc. This paper will mainly discuss how this factor affects the child's second language acquisition process among these influencing factors.

3. METHODS

In this research, we utilized questionnaires as our research methods and recruited 313 Chinese parents. Our goal is to understand parents' attitudes about studying a second language and find the preferred method. Their objective is to understand parents' attitudes towards learning a second language and find ways to prefer it.

In our view, second language acquisition focuses on providing a good language environment for children at an early age. Parents must understand and approve of second language acquisition. Therefore, we focused our survey on parents of children aged 2-6 years.

In the first few items of the questionnaire, we designed basic questions such as the age and education of the respondents, which were used to target the survey population. A few respondents were excluded from the target survey.

Secondly, we then asked whether they understood that learning a foreign language had two approaches, which were mainly used to determine whether the respondents had heard of acquisition and really understood the difference between learning and acquiring. For example, "unconsciously developing a sense of language in communication" and "systematically learning grammar and words" are respectively acquisition or learning. This was used to determine the extent to which the concept of acquisition is perceived in the Chinese education market.

After this, we designed a question in the survey to investigate whether the purpose of learning English was for use or for marks, or both. If so, which was more important. This is because we found that many parents do not care about the long-term development of their children's English language skills; they believe that after the Gao Kao exam, English is no longer useful and cannot be learned. In the current education market, exam-based education is still dominant. Parents' recognition of English proficiency is reflected in their domestic English exam results.

Finally, we surveyed parents' willingness to learn a foreign language, including whether they had ever enrolled their children in a learnt foreign language course and whether they were willing to attend a learnt foreign language course when their children were very young, with the aim of determining whether an acquired learning style would be acceptable to Chinese parents. This is the core of the entire survey, and in addition, under the 'don't want to' option, there is a special sub-section where respondents are asked to choose why they don't want to, including too much time, less effective than traditional learning, high cost, and that they are afraid to try it simply because they have not been exposed to it and don't know much about it. It was designed to find concrete ways to implement an acquired education approach in the Chinese market in the current context.

4. DATA ANALYSIS OF THE QUESTIONAIRE

4.1. Analysis of background information

The first part of the questionnaire is to investigate the background information of these respondents, and we mainly set up two questions about the age and education level. For the first question about age, the result shows that people over the age of 21 account for 96.17%. Hence, most of the respondents in our questionnaires are parents, which suits our target group and is a positive result. But

at the same time, the main objects of our research are the parents of children aged 2 to 6. Then the corresponding parents of these children should be between 26 and 32 years old, but the results show that the proportion of parents over 40 years old has reached 62.62%. Our survey results show more the influence and reactions of parents whose children are over 10 years old, which is not in line with the original goal of our survey, and the missing information needs to be supplemented later.

The second question about education level shows that 74.77% of parents have a bachelor's degree or above, while the undergraduate rate in China is only about 4%. Therefore, the respondents of this questionnaire exceed the education level of most Chinese parents, which means these parents may have a better understanding of second language learning, better financial conditions, or a better acceptance level of the concepts of two learning methods of second language acquisition. These will be the factors we consider when we analyze the results of the following questions.

4.2. Knowledge and Preceptive of Parents: What Do They Already Know

The second part of the questionnaire, which includes three questions, is to find out what do these respondents already know and their current views. The first question is: do you know there are two ways to learn a second foreign language? The results show that 61.66% of the respondents do not know, and according to the results of the first part on background information. Most of these 313 respondents are parents whose education level exceeds that of ordinary Chinese parents. On this basis, it can be inferred that most Chinese parents do not know the concept of two second language learning methods. This result is consistent with our research expectation because second language acquisition theory is not popular in China at present. In undergraduate education, it is often only linked to language-related majors, and most people have no access to it. Therefore, it also shows that large-scale concept publicity is necessary to promote the method of picking up a second language in China.

The second and third questions are raised in a form of reading comprehension. Firstly, the questionnaire provides the respondents with the basic concepts and definitions of two methods in second language acquisition: unconscious learning. In contrast, learning is a systematic and conscious process [9]. Then we ask the respondents to choose which situation is acquisition and which situation is learning. The results show that the correct rate of the two questions is about 70%, which means that the basic concepts of the two methods are not so difficult to understand. Indeed, considering that the respondents' educational background is higher than the average level, a wider group of respondents will be needed to further verify whether the public can generally understand and accept the concept of these two methods of second language

acquisition.

4.3. What Have They Done

We wanted to find out whether parents had ever involved their children in learning and study programmes and whether they had participated in acquisition-oriented English education programmes through their experiences with learning and study. The survey results showed that the results for ever participating and not participating in learning-oriented were 69.8% and 30.2%, respectively, indicating that the majority of parents were more focused on teaching to the test, i.e., more of their children were attending learning-oriented programmes. This is largely in line with our pre-survey predictions. After all, the college entrance exam is undoubtedly the most important in the eyes of most Chinese people and is the most important way to continue to get a good education. Especially for families with relatively modest means, entering university through the traditional college entrance examination is the best option for them. The percentage of parents who are interested in participating in a study-oriented programme is 53.8% and 46.2%, respectively. This result was rather surprising, with many more parents interested in participating than we thought. This indicates that many parents are, in fact, aware of the drawbacks of traditional English teaching and that they are conscious of the need for their children to learn a foreign language in their environment. At the same time, the fact that more and more students are no longer looking at GCSEs (General Certificate of Secondary Education) as the only option but are choosing to study abroad as an alternative route to development, has led parents to recognize that teaching to the test is no longer essential. At the same time, the acquisition learning approach, which allows students to quickly master English in a more relaxed and enjoyable environment and use a British and American mindset to acquire more authentic English, is increasingly recognized by some parents, especially those who have lived abroad.

As a result, there is a huge market for acquisition learning programmes in China in the future, and this is an opportunity for English language teaching. At present, there are very few schools and institutions that can teach acquisition, and the reform of English education in many schools is still limited to improvements in teaching techniques, such as the addition of new media. Most teachers are learning English in the traditional mode of education, and they are not aware of the acquisition approach to teaching and learning. It is not realistic to ask them to change their teaching style as soon as possible. If this educational approach were to be promoted and more and more students were to be taught through acquisition, it would potentially become a profound revolution in English teaching in China and greatly contribute to the development of English education. There are indeed many challenges to be faced in promoting the spread of the acquisition learning approach, and there is much work to be

done, the first of which is to promote the concept of acquisition teaching. What we urgently need to do now is to first pilot the teaching in the best schools in China, both public and private, so that teachers and parents can see the good results of the teaching and serve as a model so that the community can widely accept it.

4.4. Parents' Requirements: What do they want

In the last section of the questionnaire, we want to determine parents' requirements and expectations when choosing foreign language learning methods for children aged 2 to 6. Since scores, the importance of scores still dominate the Chinese education system will inevitably affect the choice of second language learning methods. After the survey, the results show that 49.5% of parents think that the ability to use a foreign language is more important; 47.2% of parents regard that the score is as important as the ability to use a foreign language, and only 3.1% of parents think that the score is more important. It can be seen that, to some extent, the greatest expectation of parents for their children to learn a foreign language is still pragmatism. That is, their children can use the language. However, due to the educational system, we have to pursue pragmatism and improve scores simultaneously. This enlightens us that we can figure out if the acquisition method benefits the score more than the second language learning method. Since acquiring a foreign language is basically equivalent to acquiring the mother tongue, students who learn a second foreign language through acquisition will have more advantages in learning grammar and other test contents. If we can prove to parents that acquisition is still better than learning in the score, then more parents will choose acquisition for their children. This is worthy of our further study.

Finally, we asked our research theme for parents very directly. If you can provide your children with foreign language acquisition teaching courses at a very young age, would you like your children to participate? The results show that 65.7% of parents are willing, which is lower than our expectations. After parents have understood the concept and advantages of acquisition method and agree that the main purpose of learning a foreign language is to use the language, providing perfect acquisition courses is obviously a good solution. Still, only less than 70% of parents support these curriculums. To further clarify its reasons, we set up a question for parents to choose their reasons. Among them, the high cost of acquisition courses accounts for the largest proportion among those specific reasons, which is 22.8%, followed by other reasons accounting for 31.4%. In addition, not familiar, not as good as traditional teaching, accounting for 17.1% respectively, and too much time accounting for 11.4%. This result shows that there are still many defects in the current acquisition courses, such as hiring foreign teachers. We still need to find out how to reduce the cost, how to pop-

ularize on a large scale and how to give an accurate teaching content to achieve the purpose of unconscious foreign language acquisition. Our research assumption is to turn the process of picking-up into a product with fixed quantitative teaching content just like learning courses. Therefore, how to quantify the language acquisition process and achieve the same level as mother tongue acquisition with the highest efficiency and least-cost need further exploration.

5. CONCLUSION

In this paper, we conducted a survey, and a total of 313 parents took part in our survey. Most of them are middle and upper class and have academic qualifications. The children targeted are kindergarten children and primary school students. In the survey data, we found that many parents were willing to learn SLA, and they did not have the foundation knowledge, so they did not dare to try it easily. We believe that there is a great opportunity for parents to understand that the acquisition-oriented curriculum is simpler and more effective than expected. Therefore, we can conclude from the data that many Chinese students, guided by their parents' ideas, use both methods to learn foreign languages. Also, parents believe it will improve grades and allow their children to learn a relatively pure foreign language. The vast majority of parents still think that language use is more important than language score in the choice of language score and language use, so we need to make parents understand the acquired foreign language learning method through more intensive publicity and help them understand why this method can enable children to use a foreign language better.

In addition to parents' doubts about learning effectiveness, other reasons for not choosing a learned course include cost. This is probably because the market is not mature enough, so we need to strengthen the promotion efforts.

Also, in this research, there are still lots of uncertainties and inspirations as below: (1) The form of the questionnaire has great limitations. Our questionnaire can only collect parents' information, and it cannot survey the children aged 2-6. So other methods, such as going to schools and conducting interviews, are needed to understand children's wishes and needs. (2) The content related to picking-up should be popularized to parents and children to a greater extent. Only with a certain understanding will people be willing to try it. (3) Try to indoctrinate parents who are more focused on test scores that picking up also helps a lot.

Therefore, our research is significant in exploring the parents' influences on SLA, which inspires future research.

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