



The Effect of Family Income on Parents' Motivation to Support Children's English Learning at Primary Level

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Abstract. English has been highly valued as one of the major subjects in Chinese College Entrance Examinations. And with globalization, acquiring skills to use English has become a common goal for most families. Existing studies have revealed the effects of family income on students' academic performance including on English language learning outcomes, but there has not been sufficient research on the effects of family income on English language learning motivation of elementary school students. This study investigates motivation of parents to support their children's English learning and the effects of family factors on elementary school students' English learning. We find that there is a strong correlation between family economic status and elementary school students' parents' motivation to support their children's English learning. We therefore recommend three strategies for English reaching to increase students' motivation for English learning: 1) determine learning goals and reshape students' motivation to learn English 2) increase the variables of classroom teaching 3) Stimulate interest in learning and encourage the "spirit of adventure".

Keywords: family motivation; English learning in elementary school; family income

1 Introduction

Since the reform and opening up, not only many individuals have started to pay attention to English learning and learn English through various ways in China, but also English has been added as an important part of school education in the education policy, with English as one of the three major subjects in National College Entrance Exam. Children's English learning is therefore one of hot topics that parents and education sector are generally concerned about in recent years. Early childhood education theories and critical period theories show that children have physiological, psychological and cognitive advantages in learning English. Parents have expectations that their children will learn English well, although they do not have exactly the same motivation to support their children's English learning. Many young children begin to learn English, and such choices can indeed be effective in helping children build a good foundation for their future English learning, but because of the special nature of this age group, special attention should be paid to teaching methods and formats, which should be specifically

tailored to them. At the basic stage of English education, the impact of elementary school on English learning cannot be ignored. However, the younger age group also poses challenges for English education in elementary school in China, as English teaching methods for younger children are not yet mature and research is not abundant. There is no pressure for admission exams in English at the elementary level, which is the best time to stimulate students' interest in learning. In addition to school, the family is the most important party in fostering your child's interest in learning English. Many families realize the importance of learning English, but fail to recognize the importance of motivation and interest in learning English. The current new curriculum standards in China state that the aim of English teaching in primary school level should be developing children's interest, creating environment for them to use English and helping them learn through play. However, schools lack understanding of parents' motivation to support their children to learn English, which has made the cooperation between school and family difficult and the expected outcome hard to achieve.

According to Gardner, motivation to learn a foreign language consists of four aspects: purpose, effort to learn, desire to achieve learning, and attitude to learning. If a person has an affection for the target language and the national culture of the target language, and he will be eager to learn about its history, culture and society, then he will be well motivated and take a positive and affirmative approach, which is helpful to the learning of language and culture. Conversely, if the learner has a negative attitude toward the language he is learning and its national culture, and has to learn it only because of external factors, then this learning may not be very effective. Combinatory and assimilative motivation is predicated on an affirmative attitude toward the target language and culture. Gardner and Lambert have conducted numerous experiments on this issue. Gardner and Lambert conducted a number of experiments to examine the relationship between attitudes and English proficiency. The study focused on learners' social attitudes, values, motivation, and learning outcomes. The findings show that attitudes towards the target language and its culture directly affect the learning results. [1]

Much has been written abroad about the influence of family's economic and social status on children's academic performance. A study in the United States mentioned that family environment has a significant effect on children's learning of a second language [2]. A survey of 10-11 year-old children in seven European countries showed that parents' educational attainment was strongly associated with elementary school students' comprehension of foreign languages, including English [3]. Butler's study of primary and middle school students in mainland China showed that family factors are very closely related to students' English learning [4].

Domestic research on the influence of family factors on learning has also received increasing attention. Wang Changhua's study showed that the correlation between family background factors (including economic income, parental literacy and importance) and students' academic achievement was not significant at the elementary school level, while family factors were significantly correlated with students' academic achievement at the junior high school level [5]. However, the results of Chen Ruixing's study showed that factors such as parents' occupation, parents' education level, family economic sta-

tus, family members' relationship, and family cultural environment had a greater influence on elementary school students' learning interest, learning goals, learning plans, and even academic achievement in English learning [6].

Throughout the studies at home and abroad, although there are many studies on the influence of family factors, most of them focus on the direct influence of family socioeconomic status on overall academic performance, but fewer studies on the influence of English learning, and even fewer studies on the motivation of English learning. In contrast, students' motivation has been proved to have a significant impact on academic performance [7]. Overall, research on motivation for English language learning, especially at the elementary level, is not rich and comprehensive, either in China or abroad.

Therefore, in order to provide reference for educators and parents to carry out English learning education for elementary school students, this study intends to investigate the relationship between family income and elementary school students' English learning motivation by answering the following two questions. (1) What are the main motivations of the subject groups to support their children's learning of English (2) Are there differences in families' motivations for their children's learning of English between different income groups? Based on the research results, we will give advice on English teaching accordingly.

2 Methodology

2.1 Subjects.

The subjects of this study were the parents of 56 third grade elementary school students who are 9 years old in Xingtai City, Hebei Province. 56 students and their parents came from an ordinary elementary school in the city. According to the nine-year compulsory education curriculum arrangement in Hebei Province, the school, class time, course syllabus, and teaching materials are referred to the uniform standards of Hebei Province. Therefore, no differences existed among the 56 students in terms of English teaching and assessment within the school.

2.2 Questionnaire.

This study adopted a quantitative analysis research method, and the quantitative data came from questionnaires filled out by the students' parents. A questionnaire was administered for this study to target parents. The questionnaire is consisted of 16 questions including parents' purpose (motivation) to support students' English learning, and the parent questionnaire included family background (annual family income, parents' education), family English education expenditures (expenditures on English extracurricular classes, expenditures on English extracurricular activities, and expenditures on English learning tools). The questionnaires were distributed in a class group through an online questionnaire. A total of 56 copies of each parent questionnaire were distributed in this study, and a total of 56 valid parent questionnaires were collected.

2.3 Statistics.

This study adopted a quantitative analysis research method, and the quantitative data came from questionnaires filled out by the students' parents. This study used SPSS software and analysis of variance (ANOVA) to explore whether there is a significant difference between family income and family motivation.

3 Results and discussion

3.1 Wanting children to use English as a tool to understand the world is the biggest motivation for families to want their children to learn English, while because children like it is the smallest motivation. The results of the frequency analysis (Graph 1) show that the frequency of option 3 "to use English to learn more about knowledge and culture" is 29, with a percentage of 51.786; option 1 "to get good grades" is 17, with a percentage of 30.357; Option 2 "to acquire one more skill to prepare for the workplace" was 9, accounting for 16.071; Option 4 "children like it" was 1, accounting for 1.786.

Table 1. Question 13 [drawn by the author]

Name	Choice	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
13、 why do you want your children to learn English	3	29	51.786	51.786
	1	17	30.357	82.143
	2	9	16.071	98.214
	4	1	1.786	100.000
Total		56	100.000	100.000

This result is consistent with the trend in the development of English language teaching in China. "English as a Second Language (ELT) can be divided into two categories: English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and English as a Second Language (ELT). The difference between the two is that the former is general English teaching in the sense that English is only learned and studied as an ontology and has no language application goal (the only application is test-taking), while the latter is a language that learners can use in society and is specialized English in nature. [7] Today, English in China is no longer a typical foreign language and in many places but displays a strong bilingual character. Many college students are taking all-English courses and reading original professional literature; teachers and students are encouraged to publish in international professional journals; enterprises are investing abroad. General or liberal English teaching, driven by test-taking and grade attainment, is gradually application-oriented. This change is consistent with the results of our current study, where the frequency of the motivation "to get good grades" is only about 30.357%, while the frequency of the application-oriented motivation "to use English as a tool to learn advanced culture and technology" is 51.786%. 51.786%.

3.2 Family income level has a significant effect on the motivation of wanting children to study, with higher income families focusing more on "to use English to learn more about knowledge and culture" and relatively lower income families focusing more on "to get good grades in exams". The motivation of families with relatively low income was "to get good grades". The data were first subjected to descriptive statistics using a one-way ANOVA, which yielded a significant p-value of $p \leq 0.05$, thus indicating that there is a significant difference in the motivation of children to learn English among families with different incomes. The mean values for the group with incomes of RMB100,000-RMB300,000 and the group with incomes of less than RMB100,000 on 13, what you want your children's motivation to learn English to be were $1.714^*/2.571^*$; the ANOVA resulted in a significant p-value of $p \leq 0.05$, thus the statistical result is significant, indicating that there are significant differences between incomes on what they want their children to learn English to be. See graph 2 and 3.

Table 2. ANOVA results [drawn by the author]

Name of the Variable	Varia-ble Value	Sam-ple size	Mean	Stand-ard Devia-tion	F Value	P-value (two-tailed)
5、 what is your annual income ?	100-300 thousand <100 thousand	21	1.714	0.956	14.128	0.000***
	thou-sand	35	2.571	0.739		
	Total	56	2.250	0.919		

***, ** and * represent 1%, 5%, and 10% significance levels, respectively

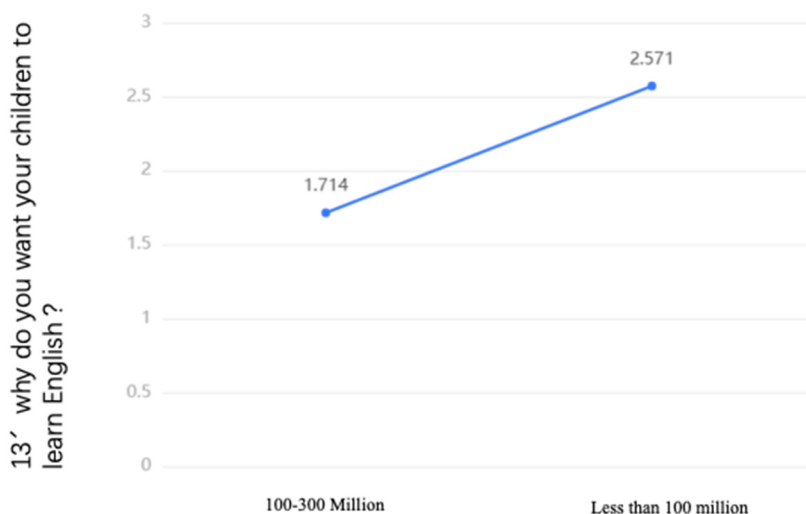


Fig. 1. Question 13

5. what is your annual income ?

This result agrees with Yuet's study. Yuet found that families at low income levels were so busy trying to meet their family's food needs that they did not have time to consider how to help their children improve their cognitive abilities and motivation, or to help their children set more long-term learning goals. [8] Zhou Yue's study showed that family income was positively related to elementary school students' English performance. [9] This study may reveal the relationship between these two studies, perhaps because families with higher income levels set more practical and long-term goals for their children's English learning, so that children are more intrinsically motivated to learn English, while simply aiming for good test scores may stifle children's interest in learning English.

4 Conclusion

Based on the survey of 56 groups of families, this study found that at this stage, families' motives for wanting their children to learn English are mainly to use English as a tool to learn more about knowledge and culture and to get good grades in school English exams. Less consideration was given to the child's own preferences. Families with different income levels had a significant effect on the motivation of wanting their children to learn. Families with higher incomes were more motivated by the more long-term goal of "using English to learn more about knowledge and culture," while families with relatively low incomes were more motivated by the more immediate goal of "getting good grades."

There are some limitations to this study. Because of the small sample size of this study, the findings lack generalizability; finally, because the annual income levels of the subjects were concentrated in the range of RMB100,000 to RMB300,000, they may not be representative of the motivation of families at all income levels to have their children learn English.

However, this study provides empirical data and up-to-date information on family motivation for English learning in elementary schools. We hope that the English learning of elementary school students will be taken seriously by parents, who will pay attention to their children's motivation to learn English, and that educators will take measures to use school education to try their best to compensate for the differences in students' English learning caused by their family backgrounds. Based on the findings of the study, we recommend the following three strategies for families and schools to enhance English language instruction at the elementary level.

(1) Determine learning goals and reshape students' motivation to learn English

First, parents and teachers should set appropriate learning goals according to their students' specific situations. Long-term goals should give students the motivation to strive for them. Second, individual motivation will increase as society demands for English increases, especially when students are required to use English for written or oral communication in their future jobs. Therefore, parents and teachers should make students realize that the ultimate goal of learning English is to use it, and give them more opportunities to practice during learning process.

(2) Increase the variables of classroom teaching

In the teaching process, we should take into account the context in which the teacher's mother tongue is not English. Based on the teaching environment, the purpose of teaching, and other factors, teachers should design the class with more elements to make the classroom more interesting and students more motivated to learn. In the process of classroom teaching, teachers can make reasonable use of multimedia teaching, such as the method of learning English by watching movies. The students can learn special sentences, cultural background, slang, etc. in the movie. At the same time, you can also use the role-playing function of audio-visual learning software to let students play the role of the movie for speaking practice and liven up the classroom atmosphere.

(3) Stimulate interest in learning and encourage the "spirit of adventure"

The best English learners usually have a strong desire to communicate, they are not afraid to make mistakes, and they have a strong spirit of risk-taking. Therefore, helping those unsuccessful language learners to overcome their shyness is the key to stimulating their interest in learning and taking risks in communication. In teaching practice, teachers who treat each student without prejudice, recognize their achievements, and praise their sense of participation will undoubtedly greatly increase their motivation to learn. As their motivation increases, students' interest in learning becomes stronger, and teachers should encourage students to voluntarily participate in various teaching and extracurricular activities and recognize their "spirit of adventure" as a help to their learning. This will not only enable more and more students to actively participate in communicative activities in the classroom, but also improve their practical language skills.

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