A Study on English Enlightenment among Preschool Children

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Abstract: Since the 1990s, English enlightenment among preschool children in China has gradually flourished. Correct attitudes should be adopted towards children’s pronunciation in learning English which is drawing the attention of kindergartens and parents. Facing various sorts of English training institutions, some suggestions are given in this paper to parents who feel confused and puzzled. To make English learning more entertaining and fully develop children’s abilities, six kinds of enlightenment could be integrated together for better effects.

1. Introduction

With the current trend of globalization, more and more attention has been paid to English. Therefore, English learning of preschool children is favored by parents and kindergartens. Preschool children refer to children who have not yet reached school age, from 3 to 7 years old. In the 1960s, the French doctor Broca found the Broca’s Area, which is the motor center of language, with the main function of programming pronunciation procedures. Penfield and Roberts put forward the “Critical Period Hypothesis” of language learning in 1959. According to this hypothesis, the Broca's Area in left hemisphere develops rapidly between 2 and 4 years old. Language learned during this period is stored in the Broca's Area and can be used flexibly. The latest scientific research shows that the best age for children to learn a foreign language is when they are nine or ten months old. Therefore, English enlightenment for preschool children should be started as early as possible.

2. Literature Review

In recent years, the study of English enlightenment for preschool children has been a hot topic in the field of education and linguistics. The domestic linguists and educators have carried out some researches on this issue, which lay the foundations for the research of this paper. Xia Bixue and Yan Li (2015) pointed out that compared with other countries, the English teaching of preschool children in China started relatively late. At present, most kindergartens do not have a unified standard for English teaching. There are widespread problems, such as large differences in the curriculum arrangement, the choice of teaching materials, and the level of teachers, although each kindergarten has its different characteristics. Zhang Zhenzhen and Liu Peiyu (2019) proposed that nowadays the society and parents pay more and more attention to English enlightenment education for children. They pointed out the misunderstandings about English enlightenment for children and introduced several solutions. Sun Xiaojie (2014) proposed to integrate interesting elements in order to attract children based on their characters and to eliminate the influence of utilitarianism.

Yu Yawen (2015) made case study on 40 children from a kindergarten in Qufu, Shandong province, aiming to find out the roles of pictures and gestures in enlightenment for children. Research showed that pictures and gestures could help children to learn English and different genders scored significantly differently. Female children scored significantly higher than male children. Jiang Fengguang and Wang Dan (2015) believe that when choosing an APP to teach children, Richard Mayer’s multimedia learning theory should be considered, including the spatial contiguity principle, the temporal contiguity principle, the voice principle, the redundancy principle and the image principle and so on. This would help parents to judge whether an APP is suitable for their children. Jia Hongxia (2018) explained the prevailing ideas concerning children enlightenment,
such as “Language Critical Period”, “Native-speaking Basics”. Children in China are short of real environment to apply language. As an important social language environment, the family plays an important role in children's foreign language learning.

3. Proper Attitudes towards Preschool Children’s Pronunciation

With all kinds of training institutions and English materials, now the children have a better English enlightenment environment. Many parents hope that their own child has a standard pronunciation, whether it is British or American English. So they consider accent as the standard of choosing the teachers and the organizations.

The standard pronunciation refers to the pronunciation of announcers of BBC, CNN and VOA. Countries of English native speakers include Australia, Scotland, New Zealand and India. People in these countries have their own accents. Many Indians are even hard to understand because of their accents. The majority of English learners in the world have the problem of pronunciation, such as Japanese and Korean. The biggest problem of Japanese is the pronunciation of “L” and “R”. But they are still confident to communicate with foreigners. But some Chinese people don’t dare to speak English for fear of pronunciation. If one can clearly express his ideas, even if there are accent problems, the consistency of the context can already make the foreigners fully understand. Therefore, encourage children to boldly show their own ideas and cultivate their logic ability is more important than a good pronunciation.

Many teachers in kindergartens and parents always correct children’s pronunciations and pay too much attention to the problem of accent. Gradually, kids feel worried about making mistakes and don’t want to speak English anymore. Having a standard pronunciation is important to make the speaker confident and easy to be understood. While the ability to communicate and explain one’s views logically is more important. Teachers and parents should put more emphasis on children’s language expression ability rather than pronunciation.

4. Analysis on English Training Institutions

There are also a lot of children’s English training institutions, including online and offline courses. The online institutions are ranked mainly according to the price, the faculty, the flexibility of the class, etc., while the offline courses depend on the factors such as the size of the branch campus, reputation, service attitude, etc., each with its own characteristics.

Popular online institutions include: 51Talk, VIPKID, GoGo Talk, vipJr, Tutor ABC, DaDa English, etc. 51Talk has a large scale, and Tutor ABC has more flexibility and competitive price. VIPKID and DaDa English, with high popularity, are relatively expensive. It costs about 200 RMB for 30 minutes’ class.

The rough ranking of offline face-to-face small organizations: EF kids English, Immersion subject English, Aston English, Disney English, etc. EF kids English is very famous because of celebrity endorsement. Compared with online courses, face-to-face classes are more expensive because of rents of classrooms, needs for more foreign teachers.

Training institution is a good choice especially for parents who are unable to teach English. It’s hard for them to choose teaching materials and design teaching processes. Parents could choose English training institutions according to the economic conditions and other situations of the family. Many parents think after choosing an institution, they can totally rely on the foreign teachers to teach their children. They neglect the indispensable role of parents in English learning for young children, especially in a non-native English environment. For preschool children, they feel more secure with parental companionship. Therefore, they are more willing to study with parents and soak in the English environment at home. Parental involvement is important and necessary. In addition, English as a language is mastered through practical application. Parents should practice English with children at any time. Parents can speak English with their kids when they play, eat, etc. However, the classes in the institutions are limited, which are only two or three times a week. This is far from enough for language learning. Try to create a second language environment in the early
days of children’s English learning, which is more important than learning many words and grammars.

Many star fathers tend to speak English to their children from time to time, like Huang Lei and Wu Zhenyu in the entertainment show Dad, Where Are We Going? This kind of behavior is not showing off. These star parents, like Liu Tao, always create a good English environment to help their children to use English in daily life.

Therefore, these training courses could be treated as an important auxiliary tool to help parents especially those who are not good at English themselves. But parents should not be substituted by these institutions because of their irreplaceable functions. Parents should cooperate with foreign teachers in the training schools. They are expected to review and practice what their kids have learned in the training courses at home. A rational attitude is needed towards these various institutions. Do not get confused with their tempting advertisements. English enlightenment for preschool children needs joint efforts from both the society and parents.

5. All kinds of Enlightenment Integrated

Most parents and teachers tend to use fruits to start English enlightenment, which are close to life and interesting. Take the simple word “orange” for example. They tell children how to pronounce it and its Chinese meaning. Most children can learn this word very quickly. But through the teaching of this word, other enlightenment could also be combined into this process to fully develop children’s brain, which would make better effects.

(1) Enlightenment of cognitive ability: What does an orange look like? Is orange a fruit or a vegetable?

(2) Enlightenment of logical ability: How to make orange juice? Try to use words to describe sequences like first, second, then, and last.

(3) Enlightenment of athletic ability: Develop kids’ fine movement that is to control the strength of the hands to squeeze an orange.

(4) Enlightenment of five senses: touch, smell, taste, sight and hearing.

Orange tastes sweet, and touches smooth. Squeezed oranges look rough and flat while fresh oranges look plump.

(5) Enlightenment of mathematics: Cut an orange into several pieces. Is each piece with the same size?

(6) Enlightenment of divergent thinking: What can be used to replace sugar to make orange juice? What else fruits are sweet? If you plan to make fruit juice by yourself, what fruit would you choose?

This method would make the learning of words more entertaining. Considering the personality characteristics of preschool children, enlightenment based on the whole brain could help kids develop other important capabilities during English enlightenment and also makes English learning more interesting and effective. Adjust this method based on observing each kid carefully because kids are different from each other.
6. Conclusion

English learning should be started as early as possible, therefore, English enlightenment for preschool children is really important. English enlightenment would not influence the study of mother language but could help children develop intelligence and linguistic ability. Teachers in kindergartens and parents have dedicated a lot of money and energy to the English enlightenment of children. They are advised to treat the problem of pronunciation correctly, actively cooperate with the training schools, and try to develop other important capabilities during English enlightenment.

References


