

Critical Period of Second Language Acquisition and Children's English Learning Strategies

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Abstract: In a period after birth, children have different induction stages to the outside world, which also have diversified characteristics in learning advantages. In infant period, children are often the most sensitive to language, therefore, the early childhood is the best language learning period for children. Children in the infant period have the highest sensitivity to language in the whole life. After the birth of the children, it is the best time to cultivate their language learning when they age between six months to five years old. During this period, we can develop infants' inherent advantages in language sensitivity. We should develop the language areas mastering the language talent in children's brains, and then give them sound guidance. This makes the children master the second language quickly at the same time when mastering the first language. Children aged from six months to five years old have great advantages in mastering the second language and possess obvious talents in language. So this article is mainly to explore the key period of second language learning for human beings, and conduct a series of analysis and discussion on how could children learn English well.

Key words: Second language; Children; Learning strategy.

1. INTRODUCTION

We know that children have more advantages on language than adults, mainly because they have no pressure from all circles and are full of curiosity and inquiry spirit to the world. They can carry out a stress-free discussion and study of language in a relaxed and pleasant environment. In addition, children's freshness feeling to the world makes them more receptive to language. In daily life, children always have strong curiosities to the surrounding objects, like imitating behaviors of other people and are greatly affected by the ambient environment. That's why they can master the language quickly in the infant period. Through experiments, more and more scientists have fully recognized such a conclusion that early childhood

is the best time to learn foreign languages. It is the best time to learn a second language when the children are in six months to five years old because they have already had their own basic judgment to the ambient environment, improved their expression ability to the object and possessed their own aesthetic judgment in this period, thus being able to rely on their own ideas to make subjective thinking and judgment of objective things. Therefore, learning a second language in early childhood will not only have no interference with the development of mother tongue, but also increase children's language learning ability and promote their intelligence development. In the infant period, the children have the strongest memory, imitating ability and freshness feeling, as well as the most sufficient space imagination and fantasy ability, thus having more powerful advantages than in other periods of human life.

How should we promote children's learning of the second language and improve their ability to accept English in the best period of language learning? How to make it easy for them to master English? How can children develop both first and second languages at the same time? How can we combine children's learning process with colorful and flexible life? How can we promote the acceptance ability of children to the second language through educational and environment? This article makes a deep discussion on these problems and produces the following learning methods, with an expectation to enable children to learn English well.

2. ENVIRONMENTAL INFLUENCE STRATEGY

Under the influence of environment, people's ability to accept things will increase exponentially. Therefore, language learning environment should also exert great influence on language learning. With environmental influence, people will often be affected in a natural, accumulated and imperceptible manner, which will gradually increase the learning ability of human beings unwittingly. For the English learning of children, creating a good learning environment is extremely

important. And children's English learning environment often includes two aspects: one is the environment he/she lives in. Children's living environment is no more than family and school. This requires teachers and parents to consciously guide their children's English learning thinking when they are in contact with their children in various ways. Teachers and parents should also use English as much as possible in the daily life or learning life of the children[1]. It is conducive for children to learn English if they can feel the English learning environment. Studies have shown that children start their hearing development in twelve months, so parents should pay attention to practice children's sensitivity to oral English when the infants are about twelve months old. The baby has a strong self-learning ability at about one year old. The freshness feeling to the environment will promote them to continue to explore, ask and learn. Therefore, during this period, parents should create a good audio-visual environment for their children. In addition, they should have a certain answering abilities. It is a good advice to let the children listen to some standard English accents, so as to practice their sensitivity to the pronunciation of the English accent, increase their understanding of English, and improve their interest. The second aspect refers to the physical environment where children live. For children, the physical environment is nothing more than the layout of classroom and the arrangement of living space environment. Therefore, schools should transform their children's classrooms. For example, children are encouraged to make their own English names for toys or dolls or even annotate them in English. The living space of the family can also be changed, for example, to place interesting English comics or posters, or to consciously guide children to watch English animated cartoons. In the daily life of children, they can also be provided with some opportunities to use and learn English, so as to encourage them to use English as a daily communication language. For instance, when children are contacting with each other, they can be encouraged to communicate with English. This can improve the enthusiasm of children to learn English, and create a kind of learning atmosphere for children to speak English, learn English, and like English, thus children will be encouraged to actively examine the development process of English and actively explore English instead of only passive acceptance. As a result, they will take the initiative to learn, experience the joy of English communication, and have the effect of getting twofold results with half the effort [2].

3. MULTIVARIANT PERFORMANCE STRATEGY

Children need to understand what is happening

around them intuitively in the language learning process. So at this stage, they must see or recognize the real object they are learning. They can have a true and profound understanding if the object is displayed to them in an intuitive image. Based on this characteristic, teachers should show the education content to children in a lively and interesting way. For example, it is suggested to employ teaching aids, pictures, toys or produce courseware through multimedia, so that children can intuitively feel the teaching content, avoid abstract understanding and wrong cognition. Teachers should start from children's characteristics in the process of making teaching aids or courseware, so that they can not only satisfy the children's desire for knowledge, but also attract the attention of the children. Educational images can be children's favorite cartoon characters, which are simple and cute, or other objects that can be touched in children's daily life[3]. It is not suggested to have some objects difficult to be understood by children or completely strange to them, resulting in a behavioral cognitive error. It is also very important for teachers to provide some reading books to children in the course of teaching and allow children to have some English reading properly. This measure can quickly improve their English writing and reading ability, promote their English accomplishment, and enable the children to attain a yet higher goal in learning the second language.

4. ENGLISH APPEAL STRATEGY

Music can always be accepted by people easily and it has no national boundaries. The charm of music is irresistible to both adults and children. People can express some of their feelings, or other factors they want to convey by music. Moreover, people's ability to learn music often exceeds their ability to learn the normal language. So using music to make children learn and feel will often enhance their interest in learning English, and greatly improve their ability to learn English. As a matter of fact, using music to help children learn English is a learning strategy that can get twice the result with half the effort. Therefore, in the teaching period, teachers should play some English songs for their children appropriately, especially some English nursery rhymes with relaxed and simple melody which are easily understood by children, so that children will learn English accompanied by the music. Children often imitate or sing songs spontaneously in the process of listening to music. It is just in this imitation and singing process, they will gradually grasp the standard English pronunciation. To a certain extent, this is also conducive for the cultivation of children's music sense. Therefore, it is indeed "killing two birds with

one stone". Learning English songs do not require a strong foundation of English language. So this is a simple way to learn English, and it also trains English intuition. Of course, children of different ages can be selected with different kinds of music. For example, children in senior grade can properly be played with some complex English songs, but for young children, direct, simple English songs, English children's songs will enable them to have English intuition in the process of learning English, and increase their understanding of English intuition. In the English learning process, music will enhance children's cognition and memory to English in melodies. This way will often increase children's interest in learning English, make children like English and take the initiative to learn English. Therefore, it is a very effective measure to let children learn English through English songs[4].

5. PHYSICAL RESPONSE STRATEGY

This physical response strategy is a learning method created by a psychology professor at San Jose State University in California. With this learning method, teachers can fully make use of the lively and active characteristics of the students of this age grade to carry out teaching activities through physical response. The physical behavior will act as an interpretation of language and behavior, so that children will have the most direct response to the language. Integrating children's English learning process into singing, dancing and playing is a learning style conforming to the learning nature of the children mostly. With this design strategy, the dull knowledge on the book will be transformed into an interesting information learning process. Moreover, some complex and elusive knowledge will also be conveyed to the information understandable to students, so that students can have an easier understanding and acceptance[5]. This kind of physical learning can also promote the communication between teachers and students, and increase the understanding of the teachers to students, so that the students can better accept the teacher's teaching ideas. This will indeed provide a lot of assistance to the teachers' teaching career. On the other hand, the teachers' communication with students can also stimulate students' learning interest to a great extent. For example, in giving lectures, the teacher can demonstrate the action of jump with fingers or legs, etc., to show the single word 'jump', which will make the child feel the course interest and then have a very intuitive understanding to the learning content, so as to strengthen the memory of the word, enhance the learning efficiency, and increase learning interest, thus achieving the aim of improving the learning efficiency of the children.

6. GAME LEARNING INTEREST STRATEGY

Game has a great impact on children and it plays a great part in children's learning and daily life, so teachers can use game as a way for children to learn language and communicate. And if this method is used properly, it will also become a very effective learning strategy. Of course, in the practical learning process, the choice of games for children of different ages is different. It is required to employ games fond by children in different ages, so as to attract the learning interests of different children, and appeal their attention, thus enhancing children's learning ability and acceptance degree to English[6]. Due to the difference in children's learning ability, children aged three to four should be more receptive to some simple games which are easy to be operated. This kind of game is usually easy to be understood and operated, thus being convenient for repeated memory.

For children aged 4 to 5, they can often be involved in some challenging and more complex games combined with their present age, psychological and physiological characteristics, such as some games with the combination of body movements and language actions, which can exercise their entire operational capacity and unity. As a result, they will have concentrated attention and accept English learning in a relaxed and enjoyable learning atmosphere. Furthermore, they will be exercised of their listening and speaking abilities in remembering new words. For example, in a relatively complex game named "stool grabbing", the stools are endowed with English words as codes and children need to read the English code of the stool when they get the stool. In this way, children can not only concentrate their attention, but also enhance their ability to memorize English words.

7. STRATEGY OF EXERCISING SELF-CONFIDENCE

Confidence is an important emotion that human needs. In the development of young children, the children have different living environments and different personalities. Children always have a sense of fear to unfamiliar people and environment, but confidence can help children remove this fear sense and learn with confidence. Therefore, it is a necessity to help children establish the confidence [7]. The children should firstly feel the care of the teachers and children from their inner heart, so that they can accept the support of the teachers and children, can accept and understand the learning contents truly and willingly. Confidence will enable children to make progress and drive children around, thus creating a good learning environment. Recognizing children and fostering children's self-confidence is a very important requirement in every

child's development process. Improving children's self-confidence is also a means to improve the quality of education, which also imposes requirements to teachers and parents. As a teacher, you should let the child feel your respect for him/her from the inner heart, instead of creating a pressure on the child with a high attitude, which will create great pressure to the child. In the process of children's learning, teachers should be good at grasping the advantages of children and giving them appropriate encouragement and appraisal. Every child should be treated equally and should not be biased or discriminated. Children are sensitive. If teachers treat different students with different attitudes, the anxiety that children generate in their hearts is not conducive to better play their advantages in the process of learning language.

Parents are also required adopt a proper reward and punishment measure in daily life to enable children to have the ability to distinguish right from wrong in daily life, so that children will increase self-confidence while not being overly arrogant.

CONCLUSIONS

Every child needs good guidance in the growth process, so that they can become useful talents for the country and society and realize their own life values. In children's learning process, it is a problem that schools and parents should take seriously to create a lively and flexible English learning environment truly accepted by children. It is required to select the learning content of the children of all ages carefully, transfer the English teaching content to children correctly and intuitively, and combine the theory with the

practice to make the children better learn and accept the English knowledge. The children's English teaching still needs the constant efforts of the school and the parents to unswervingly guide the children to learn English correctly, master a variety of languages in getting familiar to the mother tongue, promote the overall development and all-round growth of the children.

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