

# A Brief Analysis on the Psychological Advantages of Natural English Teaching Approach for Children

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**Abstract:** *To Chinese primary school students, English belongs to the second language of learning. In the actual learning process, subject to numerous factors such as the huge difference between native language and foreign language, it is impossible to completely eliminate various cultural barriers and regional barriers. However, by applying the Natural Approach where teaching activities are carried out in a natural teaching mode, English classroom teaching can be closely linked with students' real life. Through setting up a natural and real classroom environment and using flexible and diverse teaching approaches, students' learning enthusiasm can be better stimulated, who can be guided to acquire certain language skills in an active way, thus improving the classroom teaching effect.*

**Keywords:** *English teaching; psychological advantages; teaching approach*

## 1. Introduction

Childhood is the golden period for developing children's language ability. English learning in this stage can well tap children's learning potential in English, which is vital to improve their language level and contributes to the improvement of their comprehensive language level in the future. However, the actual situation shows that many English teaching methods for children are outdated, with a single teaching model and dull classroom atmosphere. The aim of students to learn English is to cope with tests, but ignore the characteristics of English as a communicative tool. In the context of specific English learning, most of the students lack enough interest, and most of them learn various English knowledge and skills by rote memorization. The Natural Approach can maximize the expansion of students' language input, and the whole input process has strong comprehensible and natural characteristics. The Natural Approach mainly focuses on various acquisition activities. Teachers can create a relaxed and natural learning atmosphere for students, effectively lower affective filter, and allow the occurrence of errors, which can better mobilize students' learning enthusiasm and improve their interest in learning.

## 2. Overview of the Natural Approach

The Natural Approach was proposed by Stephen D. Krashen and Tracy D. Terrel (1983)<sup>[1]</sup>. On the basis of studying how children produce their first language, they distinguished two different concepts of natural "acquisition" and "learning" in language learning.

Krashen and Terrel pointed out that for young children, learning a first language is not only a survival requirement, but also closely related to their real life. When children are born, they live in a real meaningful environment and naturally "acquire" their first language in daily life and in communication with their parents. "Learning" refers to students consciously learning a second language in school. Classroom teaching focuses on the training of pronunciation, grammar, sentence pattern training, dictation, sentence formation and so on. Krashen and Terrel held that in learning English, acquisition method works much better than learning method<sup>[2]</sup>. Therefore, the classroom environment should be as close as possible to students' real life. Teachers should design activities that are culturally similar to ESL students and easy for them to understand based on their past knowledge. When introducing new vocabulary and new knowledge, teachers should combine the actual surroundings as much as possible.

### 3. Theoretical basis of natural English teaching approach

The theoretical basis of natural English teaching approach is mainly second language acquisition research. In the early 1970s, a new interdisciplinary research field, second language acquisition, emerged in the United States. The central topic of this field focuses on the way people acquire a second language, involving the impact of psychological process of second language acquisition, learning strategies, environment and individual differences on learning process and learning outcomes. The preliminary research results show that second language acquisition shares many similarities with children's native language development, though it has its particularity. Given the right environment, both children and adults can still acquire a second language in the same way that children acquire their own. This conclusion is not a new discovery, and in fact, the direct method is also based on this basic idea.<sup>[3]</sup>

In the case of a first language, namely the native language, its acquisition is subconscious. People acquire their native language unconsciously, and they don't quite know how it developed from single sounds to syllables, and from pinyin to spelling, while a second language is learned (for the most part).<sup>[4]</sup> In the process of mastering a second language, learners focus on the mode of thinking, while the acquisition of native language emphasizes meaning rather than form and structure. Native language learners learn a living language directly from real life, while second language acquisition is done through syllabuses and textbooks. Native language learners unconsciously apply a variety of rules, while second language learners themselves summarize or internalize a set of rules in learning. However, second language acquisition also shares many similarities with native language, such as the sequence of mastering some knowledge.

### 4. The implementation process and teaching principles of natural English teaching approach for children

#### 4.1 Implementation process

Krashen divided the process of implementing natural English teaching approach into four stages: (1) Pre-Production; (2) Early Production; (3) Speech Emergence and (4) Intermediate Fluency (As shown in Figure1 & Table1).<sup>[5]</sup>

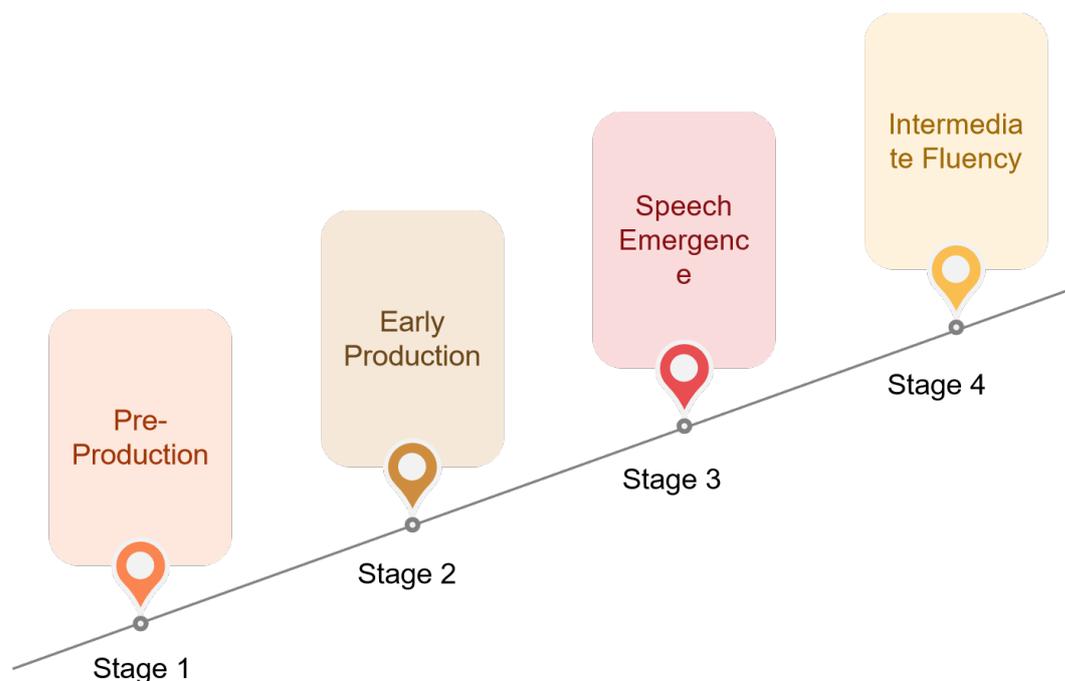


Figure1: The process of implementing natural English teaching approach

Table 1: Teaching Stage Division of Natural Approach

Stages of Teaching		Main Tasks	Available Methods
1	Pre-Production	In the silent stage, students' listening comprehension ability should be developed intensively. At this stage, teachers need to guide students to understand the language materials in a certain way, but do not impose excessive requirements on their language expression.	(1) Picture display method; (2) Combination with the characteristics of things; (3) Total physical response
2	Early Production	This stage pays attention to students' participation in certain language expression activities with their own language ability.	(1) Filling in blanks; (2) Answering questions.
3	Speech Emergence	This stage requires to strengthen the cultivation of students' language expression ability.	(1) Group discussion; (2) Free dialogue
4	Intermediate Fluency	On the basis of certain language expression ability, students' comprehensive ability of language communication can be better cultivated through various activities.	(1) Role play; (2) English games.

In the first stage, teachers talk to students naturally in class, using basic vocabulary and sentence patterns, and repeating key words with emphasis. Teachers use body movements and visual cues, such as pictures and objects, to help students understand. Students are only required to be able to understand and follow short English instructions and make non-verbal responses. It is normal for many students to go through a period of "silence" before they speak. At this time, teachers should be patient and don't push them too much.

In the second stage, teachers talk to students naturally, using simple vocabulary and sentence structure, and continuing to observe whether the students can respond correctly to simple English instructions. In addition, teachers can use general questions, alternative questions and WH-starting special questions to ask the students to answer the questions with one or two words or phrases. Students should be able to understand and respond to these questions.

In the third stage, teachers use natural and simple language to talk to students, using special questions starting with How, and ask students to explain their ideas in phrases or complete sentences. Teachers should encourage students to express their ideas and communicate with others in English in real life.

In the fourth stage, teachers can continue to use intuitional teaching aids to strengthen the teaching of key vocabulary. Meanwhile, teachers can choose a topic or ask students to describe a situation to guide them to use English. At this stage, students should be able to converse freely in English, participate in a wide range of social activities, and be able to speak and discuss questions fluently in English at academic conferences.

Krashen and Terrel stressed that teachers should not focus on correcting errors at any stage of language development. Making errors in learning a second language is common. Teachers should not be too eager to lay more emphasis on precise pronunciation and grammar, and instead, it is important to create a learning environment for students who do not have to worry about their errors often.

#### 4.2 Teaching principles

In English teaching for children, the main characteristic of the Natural Approach is to highlight "nature". It calls for teachers not to pay too much attention to the correction of students' errors, be more patient to children, and lay emphasis on the development of students' learning interest. Teachers should not force students to achieve a certain level of English knowledge.<sup>[6]</sup> Also, it is not appropriate to ask children for precise pronunciation and grammar, since students tend to lose enthusiasm for learning under such strict requirements. This also means that teachers should build a relaxed, interesting and lively English teaching classroom suitable for the development of children. It should be noted that the essence of the Natural Approach is to grasp the degree of "acquisition" of students, rather than forming

simple and rough learning. It can highlight key points, combine difficulties with ease, and reflect the gradual process in language learning. To evaluate the application effect of the Natural Approach, it should be found out from teaching practice whether it can create an environment similar to students' first language usage, whether the teaching results can be well reflected in practice, and whether students really acquire English application skills through classroom learning. Primary education centers on the guidance of teachers. Whether teachers' teaching can be close to students' actual learning level and improve English learning efficiency reflects teachers' understanding of teaching objects, content and tasks, their understanding of children's mentality, and their use of teaching materials and resources.

## **5. Psychological advantages of natural English teaching approach for children**

### ***5.1 Relaxed learning atmosphere to eliminate tension***

Only when the language students eliminate the psychological tension and actively participate in the language communication activities, can they enter an optimal state of learning and achieve the best learning results. So how to mobilize students' initiative consciousness and encourage their enthusiasm for participation is the problem facing every language teacher. The Natural Approach Theory holds that the primary factor affecting second language acquisition is emotional. Therefore, the whole point of the Natural Approach is to make students feel comfortable in classroom activities. It is one of the basic principles of the Natural Approach not to correct students' errors in the process of communication.

In the stage of children's English learning, this is a method greatly worth trying. In English teaching for children, it needs to create opportunities for them to communicate in English. In the initial communication activities, children generally have some psychological pressure, fearing that they can not pronounce correctly. In this case, if teachers still correct students' errors, it can only aggravate their fear. Teachers should explain to students that making errors is a very normal phenomenon in language learning and should not care too much, and draw their attention from the form of language to the communicative meaning of sentences. At this stage, students are starting from partial grammar. Their output is limited in all aspects and sentences produced by them sometimes deviate from the formal surface structure. But as long as the purpose of communication can be achieved, teachers should not immediately interrupt to correct a grammatical error that is not of semantic importance. Instead, teachers should use an encouraging look or a short interjection to show that their words are comprehensible and give them the confidence to continue speaking. Without the "threat" of being corrected, students' tension will be greatly reduced, and classroom communication activities can be carried out in a relaxed and free atmosphere.

### ***5.2 Effectively regulating the English teaching process for children***

Psychological research indicates that if students cannot receive information feedback, they are prone to psychological saturation, thus inhibiting their normal interest in English learning, and it is difficult to stimulate their correct English learning motivation.<sup>[7]</sup> In the course of English skill learning, natural English learning approach requires teachers to have a comprehensive and accurate understanding of students' physical and mental conditions, English proficiency and errors through the timely transmission of various feedback information, and then make targeted improvements in teaching methods and practice strategies according to the actual teaching practice. At the same time, students will also adjust and control the effective practice methods needed for their English learning according to the feedback and evaluation obtained from various aspects, as well as constantly adjust to the best psychological state. Through the joint efforts of teachers and students to effectively regulate the teaching process, the quality of children's English classroom teaching can be improved.

## **6. Conclusion**

To sum up, the key significance of the Natural Approach lies in elaborating the theory of "acquisition", explaining the difference between "acquisition" and "learning", and illustrating the gradual stage of English teaching. Its focus is on creating an environment similar to children learning their first language, so that they can "acquire" it naturally and improve their English fluency and the ability to communicate in English. When applying the Natural Approach to teaching practice, teachers need to consider various factors comprehensively. They should conduct overall control of the whole classroom teaching and ingenious environment settings, etc., to guide students to take the initiative to

learn in a variety of natural environments.

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