

A Study on the Relation between English Proficiency and Learning Environment in Elementary Schools

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This paper examines the relationship between children's English proficiency in grade three and English learning environment and experiences before entering elementary school. In English learning environment and experiences, three influences consisting of children, home environment, and environmental influences of English learning are used to find out which influences contributed to children's English proficiency in grade three of elementary school. The result of this study shows that children with high interest in English have higher proficiency in all language skills reading, writing, listening, and speaking than that of children with low interests. For parents' influences, parents' high interests toward their children's English learning and high monthly income result in children's high English proficiency. For English environmental influences, children who start at the early age and continue studying English have higher English proficiency.

{variables/English proficiency/English learning, 변인/영어 능숙도/
영어 학습}

I. INTRODUCTION

Children must be competent to maintain their existence as global citizens in the twenty-first century, which is characterized by internalization, globalization, and informationalization. Since they tend to look after their own interests in a competitive society, individual nations must take the initiative. As the trend of the world, English plays an important role by availing itself in this situation as an international language. According to a UNESCO (the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) report made in 1994, English is used by more than half of the world population as a mother tongue or an official language, not by just a specific race. English is now used on about 70% of the worldwide prints and 90% of the e-mails on Internet, accordingly, it is clear that English must necessarily be taught in childhood as a common language of the world.

For nations whose first language is not English, such demands on the necessity of English education are reflected in their educational policy in Korea. The English curriculum for elementary school was promulgated and enacted in 1995, and English was efficiently adopted in a regular course of grade three for an hour every week in 1997. It is now mature to talk about amendments to the plan which can be carried into effect rather than to discuss the arguments for and against the enforcement of English education in grade school.

With the introduction of English education in grade school, the social interest of English education quickly increased, and for this reason, the favored beginning point for English education has developed from preschoolers towards babyhood. And there was nothing to say about early child English education in the educational institute of infants, even in the sixth national curriculum of preschool education. According to the expectations of parents that English education becomes effective at an early stage, English education in the educational institute of infants quickly spread to early child foreign language education because of the needs of individuals. It is affirmatively evaluated in a side view of linguistic, physiological, physical, socio-psychological, intel-psychological development on the effects of early child English education. Some infant educators have an opposite view of early child English education. They doubt whether English learning in babyhood is appropriate before

acquiring a mother tongue completely. And then they are not sure that early child English learning in the aspect of performing a foreign language is effective because English in Korea should be taught as a foreign language, but not as a second language. Accordingly, when the study of early child English education and social demands and reality of English learning before entering school are considered, it is immediately required that the appropriateness of English learning prior to school attendance be given a base.

The purpose of this study is to evaluate both the appropriateness of English learning before school attendance and the proficiency that English is taught as a regular subject of school curriculum in the third grade of elementary school. Concretely, by analyzing the relation between English proficiency in grade three and the actuality of English learning exposed to the third grade of elementary school, it aims to find the relation between the proficiency level reached by English taught as a regular subject of the school curriculum in the third grade of elementary school, and the variables such as: child, home environment, and English learning environments of the English learning prior to entering school.

II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

While being concerned with the position of Vygotsky who is understandable and explanatory in terms of social and cultural interconnections of education in the development of a recent human being, the fundamental of early language development of a child has been receiving vigorous study to explain a primary factor between language information and educational environment of language that create social communication with mentally developmental aspect of individual (Tamis-LeMonda, Bornstein, & Baumwell, 2001). This is an inquiry into a study of English proficiency of a child using an environmental chief cause with both variables of home environment and environment variables of English learning, and also using a mental chief cause of individual with child variables.

1 Influences on Children

Yoo (2000) keeps an eye on sex as children variables in relation to language development which leads to a difference between individuals, and she notices that a girl is superior to a boy in linguistic ability. Definitely a girl is rather excellent in the aspect of language acquisition such as number of words, sentence length, pronunciation, and sentence complexity than a boy. After school attendance, a girl's speed of language development and understanding of linguistic competence is faster than a boy.

Jakobovits (1970) emphasizes that there is a primary factor of affecting a foreign language learning numbered with motivation or interest of 33%, intelligence of 20%, temperament of 33%, the others of 14%, and that motivation and interest in learning a foreign language are important. The experiment of human knowledge (Renninger & Wozniak, 1983) proves that preschool children have a various range of interest and that they intrinsically recognize or choose an interesting subject on a preferential basis. Interest relates closely to learning of a child. Accordingly, interest of a child in English learning of a preschool influences activities in class. Keeping interest and motivation leads to a success and efficiency of learning a foreign language.

2 Influences of Home Environment

There are variables of home environment and social class which produce a difference between individuals in the language development of a child. In particular, there is some difference of language use among social classes such as high class, middle class, and low class. Generally, a child in lower class has a limit of using words and of acquiring a structure of speech (Yoo, 2000).

On the one hand, there is not found through literature review concerning the parents' variables in the development of proficiency for a child. Based on the survey study of recognition related to the present condition of early English education, the understanding of English learning for a child depends on mother variables. Lee (2001) indicates that mothers in the age of 20-30 prefer the necessity of English learning for a child to that of 40. Mothers agree that the age between two and seven is the most appropriate point of beginning in

English learning irrespective of the ultimate academic background.

As it has been examined above, there is a possibility to affect the language correspondence with children according to parents' variables. The efficiency of teaching English for children is connected with English proficiency of parents, the degree of interest, and the recognition of necessity in English learning. In consequence, the difference of English proficiency for children depends on variables such as: age of parents, academic background, monthly income, English proficiency of mother, interest and necessity of English learning.

3. Environmental Influences of English Learning

According to the current condition of English learning investigated throughout the country, 66.2% of preschool children have been taught English. The beginning age of English learning for a child is 4.61. The frequency of English learning is mainly two or three times a week, though some children learn English almost every day. Children learn English for various homes such as twenty minutes, less than half an hour, or less than an hour each time. Regarding the realities of life mentioned above, there are still opposing opinions on the effect of early English learning.

In relation to the beginning time of learning a foreign language, early language learning is the flood-tide of effectiveness according to the hypothesis of innate language acquisition posited by Chomsky (1965), the critical period hypothesis of Lenneberg (1967), the hemispheric lateralization of Penfield (1959), and the social and psychological factor of language acquisition of Schumann (1975). Early English education exercises a positive effect upon the advancement of human knowledge (Cummins, 1981, Hakuta, 1986). On the contrary, some scholars disagree with the effect of early English education. The problem is still required to have the study of a language proficiency on English language institute and the effect of programs for students who are before the third grade (Genishi, 2002). The teaching methods in a preschool are books, handbooks for students, picture cards, video tapes, and audio tapes; in addition, storytelling with a fairy tale, song and chant, drama, a doll play, and a game are often utilized in a language institute for children.

The role playing and communicative learning method have a positive influence

on a child's interest and learning achievements as an effect taken to teaching methods. More than 90% children had interest in English class which was used with a fairy tale, and they positively participated in the following class activities. These activities in English class help children memorize English words. Story-telling with a fairy tale minimizes a feeling of uneasiness of a child learning English, and it strengthens motivation. A guiding method using games in English helps improve English pronunciation. At the same time, indirect learning environment rather than direct teaching method is much more effective in the development of language (Bloom, 1998). It is recognized that natural input of language in the social and cultural context influences the word development of children (Akhtar, Jipson, & Callanan, 2001, Forrester, 1992, 1993).

However, the learning effect according to the guiding methods examined above was based on the period of time before a school age or children of school age experimented for a short period of time. It was not proved that the various guiding methods in the third grade of elementary school influenced English proficiency of students through educational methods or parents at home.

III. METHOD

1 The Subject of Research

This questionnaire was conducted in six big cities and nine provinces throughout the country. It is to provide information on how much early child English learning affects grade three students. A total of 1,332 copies were collected from 1,500 students supplied through the questionnaire. The ratio of male and female students was 49.3% to 50.2%. In other words, there was no difference in a sex distinction among elementary school students who participated in the questionnaire.

Table 1
Questionnaire Conducted in Six Cities and Nine Provinces

	Area	Frequency	Valid Percentage
Item	Seoul	87	6.5
	Busan	62	4.7

	Daegu	91	68
	Incheon	92	69
	Gwangju	88	66
	Daejeon	91	68
	Gyeonggi	86	65
	Chungnam	85	64
	Chungbuk	93	70
Item	Gyeongnam	90	68
	Gyeongbuk	105	79
	Jeonnam	89	67
	Jeonbuk	91	68
	Gangwon	84	63
	Jeju	98	73
	Total	1332	100.0

Table 2
Gender Difference in the Questionnaire

	Gender	Frequency	Valid Percentage
	male	657	49.3
Item	female	668	50.2
	no response	7	5
	Total	1332	100.0

2 The Period of Research and Method of Data Collection

This questionnaire was completed by grade three students in school English class from April 2 to May 10, 2004. Through some advisors of statistics, the questionnaire was made after it was changed and reformed several times. A total of question items consist of 80. Out of the items, 28 items are related to both early child English and grade three English education. The others are associated with English four skills such as listening (20 items), speaking (20 items), reading (20 items), and writing (20 items).

3 The Method of Analyzing Research

The actual proof data related to the present situation of *early child English* education was collected through questionnaire. Window SPSS, V10.0 was used

to analyze the relation between early child English education and achievement test results of English. The proficiency test items of grade three students were made on the basis of evaluation standard of elementary school English (RRE 2001) provided from Korea Institute of Curriculum and Evaluation. The criteria of advanced, intermediate, and beginning level were established by 11-15, 10-6, and 5-0 number of answers out of 20 questions for each skill.

IV. RESULTS

Results are organized as follows. In terms of listening proficiency of starting point of English learning, students who were taught before preschool are high level 88.2%, middle level 7.8%, and low level 3.9%. Those who were taught during preschool are high level 88.5%, middle level 7.5%, and low level 4.0%. Those who were taught in the first grade are high level 84.2%, middle level 9.2%, and low level 6.5%. And those who were in the second grade are high level 77.0%, middle level 16.1%, and low level 6.9%.

In terms of speaking proficiency of starting point of English learning, students who were taught before preschool are high level 58.8%, middle level 21.6%, and low level 19.6%. Those who were taught during preschool are high level 41.4%, middle level 20.3%, and low level 38.3%. Those who were taught in the first grade are high level 31.2%, middle level 23.5%, and low level 45.4%. And those who were in the second grade are high level 20.5%, middle level 24.0%, and low level 55.5%.

In terms of speaking proficiency of starting point of English learning, students who were taught before preschool are high level 74.5%, middle level 9.8%, and low level 15.7%. Those who were taught during preschool are high level 63.9%, middle level 16.3%, and low level 19.8%. Those who were taught in the first grade are high level 56.5%, middle level 15.4%, and low level 28.1%. And those who were in the second grade are high level 47.1%, middle level 17.9%, and low level 35.0%.

In terms of speaking proficiency of starting point of English learning, students who were taught before preschool are high level 68.6%, middle level 9.8%, and low level 21.6%. Those who were taught during preschool are high level 55.5%,

middle level 106%, and low level 339% Those who were taught in the first grade are high level 535%, middle level 127%, and low level 338% And those who were in the second grade are high level 340%, middle level 238%, and low level 422%

Table 3
When Did You Start to Learn English?

b beginning 1 intermediate a advanced		Listening			Speaking			Reading			Writing			Total	
		b	i	a	b	i	a	b	i	a	b	i	a		
When did you start to learn English?	before preschool	frequency	2	4	45	10	11	30	8	5	38	11	5	35	51
		total %	2%	3%	34%	8%	8%	23%	6%	4%	29%	8%	4%	26%	38%
	preschool	frequency	9	17	201	87	46	94	45	37	145	77	24	126	227
		total %	7%	13%	151%	65%	35%	71%	34%	28%	109%	58%	18%	95%	170%
	grade 1	frequency	17	24	219	118	61	81	73	40	147	88	33	139	260
		total %	13%	18%	164%	89%	46%	61%	55%	30%	110%	66%	25%	104%	195%
	grade 2	frequency	27	63	301	217	94	80	137	70	184	165	93	133	391
		total %	20%	47%	226%	163%	71%	60%	103%	53%	138%	124%	70%	100%	294%
	no response	frequency	67	63	273	262	75	66	219	50	134	279	62	62	403
		total %	50%	47%	205%	197%	56%	50%	164%	38%	101%	209%	47%	47%	303%
	Total	frequency	122	171	1039	694	287	351	482	202	648	620	217	495	1332
		total %	92%	128%	780%	521%	215%	264%	362%	152%	486%	465%	163%	372%	1000%

p=0.01 < α=0.05

In terms of monthly income at home, 348% is more than four million won, 29.7% is between three million won and less than four million won, and 22.1% is between two million won and less than three million. In particular, the starting point of English learning is 62.7% before preschool, 40.1% in preschool, 35.4% in grade one, and 37.1% in grade two in the home of more than four million won a month. The starting point of English learning is 21.6% before preschool, 32.6% in preschool, 35.4% in grade one, and 30.4% in grade two in the home between three million won and less than four million won a month. The starting point of English learning is 9.8% before preschool, 22.5% in preschool, 20.4% in grade one, and 22.5% in grade two in the home between two million won and less than three million a month. In conclusion, the higher

a monthly salary, the earlier the starting point of English learning

Table 4
The Difference between Monthly Income and Starting Point of English Learning

		Starting point of English learning					Total	
		before preschool	preschool	grade one	grade two	no response		
Monthly income	more than 400 million won	Frequency	32	91	92	145	103	463
		monthly income	6.9%	19.7%	19.9%	31.3%	22.2%	100.0%
		starting point of English learning	62.7%	40.1%	35.4%	37.1%	25.6%	34.8%
		total	2.4%	6.8%	6.9%	10.9%	7.7%	34.8%
	300-399 million won	Frequency	11	74	92	119	100	396
		monthly income	2.8%	18.7%	23.2%	30.1%	25.3%	100.0%
		starting point of English learning	21.6%	32.6%	35.4%	30.4%	24.8%	29.7%
		total	8%	5.6%	6.9%	8.9%	7.5%	29.7%
	200-299 million won	Frequency	5	51	53	88	98	295
		monthly income	1.7%	17.3%	18.0%	29.8%	33.2%	100.0%
		starting point of English learning	9.8%	22.5%	20.4%	22.5%	24.3%	22.1%
		total	4%	3.8%	4.0%	6.6%	7.4%	22.1%
	100-199 million won	Frequency	1	2	2	3	6	14
		monthly income	7.1%	14.3%	14.3%	21.4%	42.9%	100.0%
		starting point of English learning	2.0%	9%	8%	8%	1.5%	1.1%
		total	1%	2%	2%	2%	5%	1.1%
	less than 1 million	Frequency	1	1	3	3	3	11
		monthly income	9.1%	9.1%	27.3%	27.3%	27.3%	100.0%
		starting point of English learning	2.0%	4%	1.2%	8%	7%	8%
		total	1%	1%	2%	2%	2%	8%
no response	Frequency	1	8	18	33	93	153	
	monthly income	7%	5.2%	11.8%	21.6%	60.8%	100.0%	
	starting point of English learning	2.0%	3.5%	6.9%	8.4%	23.1%	11.5%	
	total	1%	6%	1.4%	2.5%	7.0%	11.5%	
Total	Frequency	51	227	260	391	403	1332	
	monthly income	3.8%	17.0%	19.5%	29.4%	30.3%	100.0%	
	starting point of English learning	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	
	total	3.8%	17.0%	19.5%	29.4%	30.3%	100.0%	

The main materials used home for English learning among high level students are as follows Internet (88.2%), CD-ROM title (84.4%), school English textbook (83.4%), book published from private language institute (81.9%), and cassette

tape (79.9%) are used for listening Internet (35.3%), book published from private language institute (32.5%), CD-ROM title (30.2%), cassette tape (29.6%), and school English textbook (28.4%) are used for speaking Internet (58.8%), school English textbook (55.2%), book published from private language institute (53.0%), English tape (52.9%), and CD-ROM title (51.0%) are used for reading Book published from private language institute (51.8%), school English textbook (44.2%), cassette tape (42.0%), CD-ROM title (39.6%), and internet (35.3%) are used for writing

Table 5
With What Do You Study English at Home?

	b beginning i intermediate a advanced	frequency	Listening			Speaking			Reading			Writing			Total
			b	i	a	b	i	a	b	i	a	b	i	a	
			total %	total %	total %	total %	total %	total %	total %	total %	total %	total %	total %	total %	
With what do you study English at home?	English textbook	frequency	24	56	402	227	118	137	144	72	266	202	67	213	482
		total %	1.8%	4.2%	30.2%	17.0%	8.9%	10.3%	10.8%	5.4%	20.0%	15.2%	5.0%	16.0%	36.2%
	cassette tape	frequency	19	36	219	125	68	81	85	44	145	104	55	115	274
		total %	1.4%	2.7%	16.4%	9.4%	5.1%	6.1%	6.4%	3.3%	10.9%	7.8%	4.1%	8.6%	20.6%
	CD-ROM title	frequency	8	7	81	49	18	29	31	16	49	41	17	38	96
		total %	6%	5%	6.1%	3.7%	1.4%	2.2%	2.3%	1.2%	3.7%	3.1%	1.3%	2.9%	7.2%
	a textbook published from a private English language institute	frequency	4	11	68	32	24	27	23	16	44	23	17	43	83
		total %	3%	8%	5.1%	2.4%	1.8%	2.0%	1.7%	1.2%	3.3%	1.7%	1.3%	3.2%	6.2%
	Internet	frequency	0	2	15	9	2	6	4	3	10	8	3	6	17
		total %	0%	2%	1.1%	7%	2%	5%	3%	2%	8%	6%	2%	5%	1.3%
	the others	frequency	8	10	53	32	11	28	26	10	35	36	13	22	71
		total %	6%	8%	4.0%	2.4%	8%	2.1%	2.0%	8%	2.6%	2.7%	1.0%	1.7%	5.3%
	no response	frequency	59	49	201	220	46	43	169	41	99	206	45	58	309
		total %	4.4%	3.7%	15.1%	16.5%	3.5%	3.2%	12.7%	3.1%	7.4%	15.5%	3.4%	4.4%	23.2%
Total	frequency	122	171	1039	694	287	351	482	202	648	620	217	495	1332	
	total %	9.2%	12.8%	78.0%	52.1%	21.5%	26.4%	36.2%	15.2%	48.6%	46.5%	16.3%	37.2%	100.0%	

p=0.000 < α=0.05

V. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This study seeks clarification between the variables of English learning before school age, children, home environment, and environmental influences on English

learning and English proficiency in the beginning time of English education provided from school by analyzing how English proficiency is connected with English learning done before a school age. The results are discussed as follows. First of all, the total ability of English proficiency shows that it is high in the group which has a higher sense of interest in English rather than in the group which has a lower sense of interest in English in the interconnections of English learning before a school age. This result has something in common with the study of Jakobovits (1970), which suggested motivation or interest which affects a foreign language learning is strong and the study of Renninger & Wozniak (1983), who found interest before a school age is connected with the effect of learning. The higher a sense of interest, the more quickly students learn English in respect of English proficiency.

Out of the variables of home environment in the interconnections of English learning before a school age, both a strong sense of interest of parents' English learning and good family circumstances are intimately associated with English proficiency. Parents have a great necessity of child English learning in the researches of the necessity of child English learning. In particular, most parents favor native English speakers as their children's English teachers. Taking the expenses of child English learning into consideration, the difference of child English proficiency makes when a sense of parents' interest and the standard of living are high. On the one hand, it is clear that the starting point of English learning and the variables of continuance or not are the variables of English learning environment which affect English proficiency of children in the interconnections of English learning before a school age. As it is mentioned in the hypothesis of innate language acquisition of Chomsky (1965), critical period hypothesis of Lenneberg (1967), hemispheric lateralization of Penfield (1959), social and psychological factor of language acquisition of Schumann (1975), the earlier learning a foreign language, the bigger the difference of English proficiency. Indirect learning environment rather than direct teaching method is much more effective in the development of language (Bloom, 1998). For example, listening to English tape and attaching English words to a wall make a difference in the English proficiency. The more the times of English learning per week or the longer learning hours for each, English proficiency of children is high. For this result, a foreign language acquisition and a learning demand of

language in the environment of EFL are required to have individuals of a learner intentionally increase the exposure time to English and opportunity for English learning because the quantity of language input and the necessity of language are variable (Lee, 1995)

Among the variables of preschool children's English proficiency, it is found that the onset of learning English, the degree of interest among the children, the parents' income, and other variables of home environment are all relatively influential. This paper has demonstrated that the ability of a preschool child with early English learning is related to the English proficiency of a third grader in elementary school. Therefore, early English learning is appropriate for acquiring a foreign language on the basis of English proficiency.

The results of this research call for the following considerations: first, parents need to take a bit more interest in their children and cheer them on English learning; second, once preschool English learning begins it should continue without interruption through elementary school; third, an indirect learning environment is necessary for children at home rather than a direct learning environment; fourth, in English learning, it is common that children learn from an individual or at a professional language institute; fifth, early English learning also helps to encourage a child's first language proficiency as well as social and psychological development.

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예시언어(Examples in) English

적용가능 언어(Applicable Languages) English

적용가능 수준(Applicable Levels): Elementary/College

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