

An Analysis of the Success of Early Childhood L2 Acquisition

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Abstract

Parental guidance for early childhood L2 acquisition was investigated. There are three stages of parental guidance as a guide for achieving high school level English reading skill under the age of twelve years old. This is the hypothesis of this paper.

Introduction:

In discussing early childhood L2 acquisition, consideration of the overall coverage of guidance for the development of aspects of intelligence will be indispensable. Gardner (1983) proposed the idea of Multiple Intelligences. He presented at least seven different intelligences: musical, spatial, bodily kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, logical mathematical, and linguistic intelligences. Early childhood L2 acquisition seems to be related to the development of these aspects of intelligences. Especially, musical, mathematical and linguistic intelligence seem to be related to the successful acquisition of high school level English reading skill as readiness factors. Intrapersonal intelligence also affects the third stage of parental guidance for accelerated children in that it directs children to persist on achieving their goal.

Objectives:

The major aims of the research are to analyze the quantity and the quality of parental guidance for the accelerated children as readiness factors for raising English reading skill.

Method:

The data taken from "The List of Accelerated Children" (Kumon Institute of Education, 1995) are analyzed. The list contains 44 cases of accelerated children who achieved a high school level English reading skill under twelve years old. The data were individually filed and were neither categorized nor analyzed.

Following are the items of the questionnaire asked to the parents of the accelerated children:

1.date of birth (AGE(Month) in Table.1), 2.the age when the reading program was started (AGE(ENG.)), 3.the age when the Japanese program was started (AGE(JAP.)), 4.the age when the math program was started (AGE(MATH.)), 5. the level of English when investigated (LEVEL(ENG.)), 6. the age (months) of children when their parents started reading aloud for them (ST.READING), 7. the number of books the parents read aloud a day for their children (NO.BOOKS), 8. the age of the children (months) when they started reading by themselves (TM.SELF READ), 9. the level of Japanese (LEVEL(JAP.)), 10. the level of English (LEVEL MATH.)), 11. the number of books the children read a month at the time of the research (NO.BOOKS SELF READ), 12. the length of time they spent a day for the reading (LENGTH OF SELF READ), and the abilities, in which the number of each item was asked; 13. (a) the largest number read aloud sequentially by the child (NUM. READ), (b) the largest number written sequentially by the child (NUM. WRITTEN), (c) the number of "hiragana" which could be read aloud by the child (HIRAGANA), (d) the number of katakana which could be read aloud by the child (KATAKANA), (e) the number of "kanji" read aloud by the child (KANJI), (f) the number of the English alphabet which could be read aloud (ALPHABET), (g) the number of the songs the child could recognize (SONG NKNOWN), (h) the number of songs the child could sing (SONG SUNG). With these items, parents' description about the contents of parental guidance were asked: 14. expected reasons for the success of achieving the level, 15. special skills the children showed at the time of the investigation, 16. the character or personality of children, 16. parental input for their fetus, 17. parental guidance provided by the time of investigation.

The item from No. 1 to No. 14 were enumerated and the item No. 15 to No. 17

were categorized for the analyses.

The data were compared with the results from the 1995 study (Tanabe, 1995) in which the different group of accelerated children were investigated and 1992 study (Tanabe, 1993) in which the ordinary children were investigated in nearly the same condition.

Results:

The parents' answers were enumerated in order to make the comparison among the results from the other studies possible. Table 1. shows the averages of each item. The results were compared with those of Tanabe, 1995 and those of the ordinary children (Tanabe, 1993).

Table 1. The characteristics of the parental guidance provided to the accelerated children

	AGE(Months)	AGE(ENG.)	AGE(JAP.)	AGE(MATH.)	
Average	111.7	62.34	41.46	45.73	
Tanabe(1995)	113	50.24			
Ordinary(Tanabe, 1993)	97.3			69.9	
	LEVEL(ENG.)	ST.READING	NO.BOOKS	TM.SELF READ	
Average	47.03	17.9	14.4	36.4	
Tanabe(1995)	32.95	16.36	9.69	37.95	
Ordinary(Tanabe, 1993)	14.58		4.1	46.3	
	LEVEL(JAP.)	LEVEL(MATH.)	NO.BOOKS	SELF READ	
Average	38.42	36.2		25.1	
Tanabe(1995)	24.1				
Ordinary(Tanabe, 1993)	14.58	19.98			
	LENGTH OF SELF READ	NUM.READ	NUM.WRITTEN	HIRAGANA	
Average	48.1	454.56	3994.62	36.92	
Tanabe(1995)		888	1105.6	39.97	
Ordinary(Tanabe, 1993)		5457.4	11396.8	47.8	
	KATAKANA	KANJI	ALPHABET	SONG KNOWN	SONG SUNG
Average	32.07	32.41	18.07	100.03	43.32
Tanabe(1995)	31.84	72.77	17	147	69.97
Ordinary(Tanabe, 1993)	42.6	65	13.8	90.4	43.9

The average age was 111.7 months (about 9 years 4 months) at the time of the research, started learning English in a reading program at 62.34 months (about 5 years 2 months). They started the Japanese learning program at 41.46 months (about 3 years 5 months) and math at 45.73 months (about 3 years 10 months), which means that they had started the Japanese and the math program prior to the English reading program. The parents started reading aloud for the

children at 17.9 months (about 1 year and 6 months), which was almost the same as the result of 1995, at 16.39 months. They read aloud 14.4 books a day for their children, which was different from the results of the other two, 9.69 in 1995, and 4.1 of ordinary children in 1993. The accelerated children started to read by themselves at 36.4 months (about 3 years), 37.95 months in 1995, and 46.3 months in 1993 for ordinary children. There was almost 10 months difference between the accelerated groups and the ordinary one. The level of Japanese at the time of research was 38.42 which was similar to the third year level of high schoolers', 24.1 in 1995, which was the second year level of junior high schoolers', and 14.58 in ordinary children which was the same as the second year pupils of an elementary school. The level of math at the time of the research was 36.2 which was equal to the second year level of high schoolers', 19.98 in ordinary children, which was equal to the fourth year pupils' level of an elementary school. The accelerated children of the first column read 25.1 books a month spending 48.1 minutes a day.

The other items were the numbers that each group of children could read, write, know, etc., as shown in Table 1.

Table 2. shows the characteristics of the inputs that the parents of the accelerated children provided while their children were still fetuses (prenatal care). The results were categorized basically in three groups and also sub-categorized to show their contents. There were 22 cases of linguistic inputs which consist of talking to fetuses, reading aloud for siblings which were also expected to be heard by the fetuses, and playing English tapes. There were 17 cases of musical inputs which consisted of playing classical music, reading rhymes aloud to their stomach, playing the piano, and playing music. There also were 3 cases of sentimental inputs which consist of relaxation, reading books, and doing Sado.

Table 2. The parental input for the fetuses

Linguistic input(22):	Musical input(17):	Sentimental input(3):
Talking to fetuses(17)	Classical music(7)	Relaxation(1)
Reading aloud for siblings(4)	Rhyme(5)	Reading books(1)
English tape(1)	Piano(3)	Sado(the tea ceremony)(1)
	Music(2)	

Table 3 shows the parental guidance for the accelerated children during their infancy. The answers were categorized into 6 groups: Language (50 cases), which was relate Mathematics (10 cases) , which was related to mathematical input, Figure (9 cases), which was related to geometrical input, Drawing (2 cases), which was related to artistic inputs or outputs and Skill (7 cases), which was the trainings related to manual skills. Specific contents are in Table 3.

Table 3. The parental guidance for the accelerated children

Language(50):	Music(19):	Mathematics(10):	Figure(9):	Drawing(2):	Skill(7):
Chinese	Piano(11)	Drilling(6)	Puzzles(6)	Cutout(1)	Blocks(5)
characters(12)	Music(3)	Reading	Building	Drawing(1)	Handicraft(2)
English	Rhyme(2)	numbers(2)	blocks(3)		
conversation(9)	Song(1)	Calculation(1)			
Poem(Haiku)(9)	Classical	Multiplication			
Picture book(3)	music(1)	table(1)			
Carta(3)	Other(1)				
Other(14)					

The parents' responses to the question about the expected reasons for the success in achieving the high school level of English reading skill were in Table 4. Five categories were set for the grouping of the answers. The answers were categorized under the titles of Motivational factors, Methodological factors, Environmental factors, Attitudinal factors, and the factors related to abilities as readiness factors. There were 26, 18, 4, 10, and 10 answers for each title, respectively.

Table 4. Expected reasons for the success of achieving the level of English reading skill

Motivational	Methodological	Environmental	Attitudinal	Ability
Goal(12)	Continuation(8)	Brothers and	Self motivated(2)	Reading(6)
Teacher(5)	Daily practice(6)	sisters(3)	Love English(2)	Japanese(2)
Peer(4)	Other(4)	Other(1)	Make effort(2)	Mathematics(1)
Father(3)			Unyielding(2)	Concent-
Mother(2)			Steady(2)	ration(1)
Method(1)			Other(6)	
Other(5)				

The special skills of infants were categorized under the 7 titles: Skill, Music, Creativity, Memory, Language, Number, and Kinesthetic. Language meant, for example, the child had that special skill which was related to linguistic skills. Manual skills are the ones which were the most often pointed out preceding Musical skills.

Table 5. Special skills of infants

Skill	Music	Creativity	Memory	Language	Number	Kinesthetic
	13	12	10	8	5	4

Finally characteristic feature of the accelerated children were listed. Their characteristic features were presented by adjectives which best represent their aspects of personality. The further analysis will not be an aim in this paper, though.

Table 6. Characteristic features of the accelerated children

Cheerful	Gentle	Interested	Active	Unyielding	Concentrative
20	10	9	7	6	6
Memory	Kind	Patient	Reading ability		Positive
5	5	5	5		2

Discussion:

Three stages of parental guidance found:

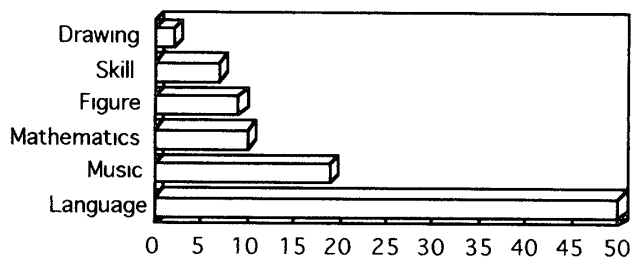
There seems to be three stages in which appropriate styles of parental guidances could be necessary.

The first stage is prenatal. During the prenatal period, the successful parents provided, linguistic, musical and sentimental inputs. 50 % of the parents provided linguistic input. Among them, 77.2% of those talked to their fetus, 18.2% read aloud for the fetus' brothers and sisters, and 4.5% played English tapes. 38.6% of the successful parents provided musical inputs by playing classical music (41.2%), and sang or played tapes of rhymes (29.4%). Only a small number of parents cared about the sentimental factors to relieve mothers.

The second stage comes after birth. In this stage, six kinds of parental guidance might be necessary. (See Figure 1.) The first type is linguistic inputs, the second is musical inputs, the third is mathematical and geometrical inputs and the fourth ones are artistic input, the fifth one is manual skill training, the final one is drawing. These inputs are expected to establish a basis for comprehension of wider and deeper aspects of the world, in other words, facilitates the cognitive development of children, which could also be thought as a readiness factor for the achievement of high school level English reading skill during infancy.

In achieving high school level English reading skill, motivational and attitudinal factors seem to work as important factors as well as parental guidance before and after the birth of children. (See Table 4.) The third stage starts when the accelerated child develops his or her goal of acquiring English reading skill. In the third stage where they finally should meet their goal, motivational and attitudinal factors seem to basically affect it, which might be interpreted as a use of intrapersonal intelligence (Gardner, 1983). Teacher's, father's, and mother's advice, and a learning opportunity with their peers could be helpful to get over the problems of achieving their goal.

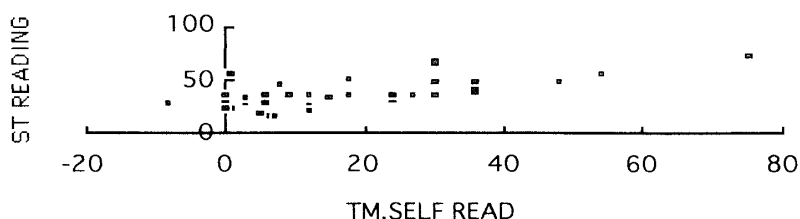
Figure 1 Parental Guidance



Linguistic inputs as a form of parental guidance:

The accelerated children could read books by themselves in L1 an average of 10 months earlier than the ordinary ones. This might be attributed to the earliness of providing opportunities to listen to his or her mother read books for them. The mothers of the accelerated children read average 14.4 books a day, 9.69 books in the 1995 study, and mothers of ordinary children read 4.1. There was a correlation between ST.READING and TM.SELF READ (See Figure below.) if examined by calculating Pearson's r . ($N=44$, $-1 \leq r \leq 1$, $r=0.67$), which means the later parents start reading aloud for the children the later the children start to read by themselves.

Figure 2. Correlation between ST READING and TM SELF READ



Music as a form of parental guidance:

In Table 2., and Table 3., parental guidance related to music was frequently pointed out. There seems to be two possible assumptions regarding the influence of music for language acquisition. The first one is that linguistic components of music, the words of songs could be linguistic inputs and the second one is that the melody or the rhythm or music as a whole could have a good influence on the development of linguistic acquisition ability.

Conclusion:

In this style of unintrusive study, I am identifying causal relationships among forms of parental guidance, and between parental guidance and L2 acquisition. The tendency of the relationship is observable. The three stages of parental guidance is the model that suggests or directs parents who try to raise their children as successful learners of L2.

Referents:

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