

Family as a Social Aspect on Students' English Achievement in Chinese Middle School Students

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Abstract

This paper explored the influence of family factors towards to middle school students' English learning; and focus on parents' attitude on English learning and parents' participation on children's English studying after school and the extra time and money that parents spend on students' extra English courses. Parents' involvement has great impact on Chinese students' English achievement.

Keywords

English achievement, chinese students, social aspect.

1. Introduction

English is one of main required subjects in Chinese middle school. English requires daily work certain involvements in the family could improve students' English achievements[1].In Wang's study on the relationships between Chinese familial factors and English achievements, he found four factors that positively related to students' English achievements. They are familial English cultural activities, mothers' English educating ideas and patterns, the frequency of parents' promoting children to use English, and familial economic background[1].

Middle school students would face more challenges and uncertain changes, compare to younger students. From parents' side, the subjects in middle schools are more complex and harder than elementary schools, which make it difficult for parents who do not have good education background to involve. From teachers' perspective, it is more and more difficult to teach English in Chinese middle schools nowadays. One of the important challenges is the considerable gap between students' English levels. In the same classroom, some students could comprehend intermediate English skills, but some students only understand few English words. Family is one of the major reasons heading to this situation.

2. Parents' Attitude

Parental attitude is the most important part in English learning. Without the positive attitude and support, it is meaningless to discuss the affect of parents' education background, financial income and the involvement in students' learning.In China, although English is still considered as a significant subject in school, some parents might have the idea that English should not be placed as the primary subject in children's education.

It is very obvious that students cannot have good English achievements when they have parents who always have negative attitude towards to English learning. Students also feel that they do not need to study since they are Chinese and it is meaningless to study English. They would do other things such as write other subjects' homework, or just not listen to the class at all. Normally, these students' parents do not have good education background and tend to have a lower social status. They never benefit from learning English normally is the main reason that they believe that English is meaningless.

Parents' attitude is their attention to their children's English learning. Parents paid more attention to their children's studies; their children would have better English achievements than other whose parents didn't pay much attention.

Thus, although parents' education and income also play important roles in children's English learning, their attitude is the one to decide their actions. One of my students is from family that his parents have a Lamborghini, but his father refused to buy any additional English learning material for him. Because he believes that his son does not need to study English outside of classroom. However, this father's attitude totally influenced his son. He gave up learning English entirely in school.

Another instance is totally opposite and positive. There is a student with good English achievement from a working class family. His parents do not speak or understand English at all. However, his mother believes that English is the basic tool for work in the future. Although the family has lower income than others, His mother still takes him to public libraries and sends him to the agency to study English. At the same time, he also has a positive towards to English learning as well. As a consequence, this student could speak English since a very young age.

3. Parents' Participation

Compare with parents' attitude, their actual participation is also a very important step. Some parents also consider that their children should study English and English plays important role in their children's life. However, the differences between these parents is whether they really take action to participate in their children's English learning. These differences would turn into the differences between the English achievements in their children[2].

3.1. Family Environment for Learning

Family English learning environment means that the English materials including books and the audio materials which family provided for the children positively relates to students' achievements, and also using English at home. For parents who do not have the capacity to use English, the family environment might be boring since their children cannot have the opportunities for communication[3].

3.2. Three Types of Participation in Behaviors

Grolnick and Slowiaczek believed that children would process the resources that provided by their parents, so they focused on researching on the children's feelings related to the resources[2]. In addition, they researched three dimensions on the depth of parental participation. Grolnick and Slowiaczek's classification not only described phenomenon, but also provided the systematic structure for this area. Their study showed that parents influenced on students' learning motivation, and eventually positively related to students' achievements[2].

The first one is the behavioral dimension, the participation of behavior. It includes the parents to participate in the teacher - parent conference and school related activities, counseling students' homework and communicate with teachers about their students' school performances [2]. From my own teaching experience, attending school conferences and communicate with teachers are all necessary but not significant to students' English achievements. The learning process still needs students to perform, not their parents. If one student was lack of motivation, it is not important for his or her parents to participate in school affairs. And counseling students' homework could have extremely different outcomes. For some students, it works because the parents have regulations for them to remember the English words and read more English materials. However, for some other students, it is very easy for them to have a sense of dependency on their parents. This situation would lead them to lose their independent thinking and self-regulation in English learning, and eventually their English performances would not be improved[3].

The second one is the cognitive dimension, the mental involvement. It means that parents provide children all the resources to help their development of intelligence, which includes purchasing materials and books for students, taking children to the museum or library and having discussions with their children[4]. In my class, it is not very obvious that purchasing materials could promote students to study English. However, taking their children to different places and activities related with English can increase students' motivation and interests since they could use the language.

The third dimension is personal involvement. This dimension states that parents would involve in understanding what happened to their children in the school and what their children learned from school every day [4]. Discussing with students about their conditions could help the parents to have opportunities to help their children. In addition, the school conference I mentioned before would be helpful when the parents really know the conditions of their children. It is an expression of positive attitude to show that parents care about their children and would like to know more about their children's daily life in school or related to schoolwork.

3.3. Academic Socialization

Hill and Tyson researched more than fifty studies on the correlations between parents and academic achievements[5]. They compared three types of participation; academic socialization, school based involvement and home-based involvement. The results demonstrated that helping children on their homework did not correlate with children's academic achievements strongly. However, academic socialization had the strongest relation with children's academic achievements[5].

Academic socialization focuses on the following areas. It includes that parents talk to their children about their expectations for their students' achievements and values on education, foster educational aspirations in their children, and discuss learning strategies with children and help their children to make preparations and plans for the future. Eventually, students will develop their abilities in logical thinking, problem solving, planning, and making decisions [5]. At the same time, Castro et al. analyzed thirty-seven studies in kindergarten, primary and secondary schools carried out between 2000 and 2013[6]. They believed that the students' achievements would be improved when the parents have high expectations, and consistently have communications with students about school activities and schoolwork, and promote students' reading habits. On the other side, supervising homework and attending school activities didn't significantly related to academic achievements. This result proved Hill and Tyson's work in 2009.

4. Conclusion

English is a required course for all the Chinese students starting from middle school to college. Parents who consider English is important to their children and have good financial condition, they would send children to elementary schools, kindergartens or additional training schools that provide English courses. Thus, their children already have learned English for years. After entering middle school, they would like to continue spending time and resources on their children's English learning.

However, parents who have the negative opinions towards to English learning, not only provide few English learning opportunities besides the courses that are required in public middle school, but also influence their children's motivation towards to English learning in middle school. On the contrary, some parents who cannot afford extra English courses and consider English is important, would encourage their students to study English in school. Thus, their children's motivation would still be positive towards to English learning.

Parents' educational backgrounds also provide different language learning environments for their children. Students could speak fluent English when their parents provide them an English speaking family environments and use English as a second language in daily family conversations. In addition, those parents could advise their children on after school academic reading and writing as well if they have and want to devote time on their children's English learning.

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