

An analysis of the problems and effectiveness of children's English education from the perspective of behaviorism

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Abstract. Behaviorism learning theory has dominated learning theory in the US for the past 50 years and is currently one of the major schools of thought. According to this idea, human thought arises via interaction with the outside world or the development of a "stimulus-response". In recent years, early childhood education has attracted more and more attention from various groups in society. Today, the field of children's English education is developing rapidly, but due to the particularity of children as an educated group, there are many problems and difficulties in English teaching and learning. This review analyzes and concludes that using behaviorism theory to guide children's English teaching and consolidating the knowledge learned through repeated practice is of great significance to children's English learning. It also puts forward suggestions that behavioral teaching concepts should be rationally used to formulate more flexible children's English learning strategies and make correct analyses and improvements.

Keywords: Children's English education; Behaviorism; English teaching.

1. Introduction

Nowadays, more and more people believe that learning English should start from an early age, and children's English teaching has become the object of close attention. These studies and methods have made effective contributions to how to promote children's English education. Early linguists have found through the study of children's language learning that children may master their mother tongue because they imitate the adults around them in their living environment. Later, influenced by Pavlov's concept of "conditioned response", researchers began to try to theoretically analyze the relevant factors that affect children's language learning. With the deepening of the study of behaviorism and the absorption of the views of the structuralist school of language, behaviorism learning theory is finally formed. Behaviorism believes that learning is the combination of stimulus and response, the organism accepts the external stimulus and then responds, and the connection between the two (S-R) is learning [1]. This theory explains the phenomenon of children's language learning and has been widely supported. It has become the basic theory of language learning and has important guiding significance for language teaching. This review uses behaviorism theory to analyze the current situation and problems in children's English and puts forward suggestions for using behaviorism characteristics to observe, imitate, repeat, and strengthen, aiming to help teachers and parents provide references for improving children's education and learning effectiveness.

2. The Current Status and Problems of Children's English Education

At present, children's English education is very common. There are a large number of English enlightenment courses in kindergarten courses, various off-campus training institutions, etc. But at the same time, behind the rapid development of English enlightenment education, many problems deserve people's attention and need to be standardized and improved.

2.1. Social Factors

2.1.1 Lack of correct understanding of children's English education

In the ideological concepts of many children's parents, even though some parents are aware of the importance of English education to children's development, they only focus on the cultivation of

children's enthusiasm for learning English and the cultivation of application skills, and ignore the improvement of children's ability to flexibly change their thinking. In addition, most Parents have the idea of indoctrination education and blindly cultivate children's social practical abilities, and even send children abroad to receive more education [2].

Generally speaking, parents do not have a correct understanding of English education and put too much pressure on children, which affects the development of children's subjective initiative in learning.

2.1.2 Lack of strong English teaching staff

The lack of a strong team of English teachers in children's English education institutions is an important factor in the current problems in children's education. Usually, English teachers can be divided into the following categories: First, teachers who are engaged in the English industry. Second, teachers engaged in children's English education industry. Third, teachers who understand English and can master it. Finally, foreign English teachers. These types of English teachers either do not have deep knowledge of English and cannot better communicate with children in a multilingual environment, or there is a lack of training skills in child psychology, and they do not know how to design teaching sessions based on children's physical and mental growth needs, which cannot stimulate children's interest in learning and affect children's learning efficiency. Even teachers who only know a little about English do not have basic English pronunciation skills, which is not conducive to children's progress and growth in English subjects. In addition, foreign teachers may not have teacher qualification certificates or may not be able to fundamentally use a combination of Chinese and English to communicate with children, which affects the effectiveness of English teaching [3].

2.1.3 Problems with English learning methods

The existing English teaching model is mostly a class teaching system, and the more widely used method is the narration method, which mainly focuses on teacher narration and children's imitation, while practice and activity links account for a small proportion. Therefore, children are relatively passive in the learning process, and the development of creative thinking and sensitivity to language is limited [4]. In addition, in many schools, a very small number of English teachers use foreign English books, and some teachers use English books and English audio-visual products developed in China, even though some English teachers do not have specific teaching materials during preschool teaching. The content taught is determined by the English teachers alone, without enhanced practicality and comprehensiveness, and is divorced from children's learning and life. Even if English teaching materials are used, the content is not perfect enough to meet the needs of children to improve their cognitive level. The content and related knowledge of the teaching materials is not accurate and vivid enough, causing preschool English education to lose its significance.

2.2. Personal Factors

Children in lower grades of primary school tend to lack interest in learning English. They have poor independent learning ability, short attention span, and lack of endogenous motivation for English learning itself. In the learning process, teachers occupy a dominant position, and teaching activities are mainly designed and controlled by teachers, focusing on the teaching of theoretical knowledge. Classroom activities are mostly based on mechanical drills. Although this model can help students quickly memorize the knowledge they have learned, a large number of repeated exercises may weaken children's interest in English and cause difficulties in in-depth learning in the future.

3. The Role of Behaviorism Theory in Learning

Behaviorism theory was first proposed by American psychologist Watson John Brodus in 1913. He argued that psychology should focus solely on stimuli and responses that are observable and quantifiable, abandoning subjective concepts like awareness.

In his opinion, the object of psychological research is not consciousness but behavior. The behavior he believes is first of all an observable body response, and the essence of its response is the adaptation of humans and animals to the external environment. In the theory he proposed, drive, connection, and reinforcement are the most important parts of behaviorism theory. Therefore, behaviorism theory plays a vital role in children's English learning.

3.1. Internal Drive: The Basic Prerequisite for Learning

Learning motivation refers to an individual's needs and satisfaction with learning goals, which drives individuals to adopt specific behaviors and persist. The internal drive is the basic prerequisite for learning. Without internal drive, effective learning cannot be carried out. It needs to be emphasized that drive is not a patent of behaviorism. Other learning theories also attach importance to the role of drive. Behaviorism first proposed the concept of drive in a theoretical form and discussed it in detail. Some insights can be gained from behaviorist experiments. For example, in Pavlov's experiments, dogs responded to the conditioned stimulus of a bell because of their desire for food [5]. In Skinner's research, white rats experienced the same thing. Consequently, even though external motivation is the primary driving force behind children's learning, internal motivation for learning is at the heart of external learning motivation. Therefore, in the education process, teachers and parents must gradually transform external motivation into internal motivation, on the other hand, external motivation should be used to keep children's already formed internal motivation in a continuous state of stimulation.

3.2. Learning: The Connection between Stimulus and Response

Learning is the association between stimulus and response. This is the most typical and important feature of behaviorist learning theory. Thorndike believed that learning is an association, and the human mind is an association system [6]. Pavlov's dogs learned to salivate in response to the sound of a bell through its association with food. Thorndike's cats learned to open the latch to obtain food through the association of doors and opening doors. Skinner's rats learned to press a lever to get food by associating pressing the lever with getting food. This can explain how children's language learning occurs through stimulation from the external environment. With a similar conclusion, Li also proposed that behaviorist psychology mainly expresses people's psychological activities through stimulation and response. This model has had a profound impact on English teaching [7].

3.3. Reinforcement: The Key to Successful Learning

Thorndike's theory's concept of reward and Skinner's concept of reinforcement are comparable. According to this idea, reinforcement of the outcomes of students' learning behavior is the primary factor influencing the consolidation or reappearance of those behaviors. Reinforcement is the process of using reinforcers to raise the likelihood of a specific operational response [8].

Positive and negative reinforcement are the two categories into which reinforcement can be separated. When someone exhibits an expected behavior or reaction, positive reinforcement occurs when someone gives them a reward they enjoy receiving or a stimulus that makes them happy. This increases the frequency with which the behavior or reaction occurs. Rewards serve as a form of positive reinforcement, and teachers commend their students for their good behavior. Removing an unpleasant stimulus to enhance the frequency of behavioral responses is known as negative reinforcement. The teacher can remove the initial sanctions when a student behaves appropriately, such as when they stop running about the classroom or crying and causing problems. Encouraging pupils to reflect on themselves, can help to fulfill the goal of rectifying their negative behavior.

Positive and negative reinforcement work together to make a reaction more likely to occur again; negative reinforcement is not the same as punishment. When employing it particularly, educators need to be mindful of the differences between punishment and negative reinforcement. For instance, teachers can provide incentives (positive reinforcement) to students who perform well in class to motivate them to keep up their good work. Alternatively, after the teacher reminds them aloud, the students fix their errors. Then, to allow the kid to keep doing well in class, the teacher reverses the

decision to punish him (negative reinforcement) [9]. Teachers use reinforcement specifically and flexibly based on students' performance.

In short, teachers' reinforcement methods should be different for each individual, teach students by their aptitude, and give full play to the role of reinforcement.

4. The use of Behaviorism in Children's English Education

Young children have significant personality traits both psychologically and physically. Physiologically, they have poor immunity and developing athletic abilities, but psychologically they are arbitrary. Behaviorism theory can effectively adapt to children's psychological and physiological characteristics by refining teaching steps having a suitable learning atmosphere, and shaping and modifying children's behavior through external factors.

4.1. Provide a Suitable Learning Environment

The process of language learning in children is regarded by behaviorism as an uninterrupted stimulus-response process. Wan research shows that schools can use children's keen observation in children's learning, living places with bright colors to paste daily English words or sentences to attract children's attention. In addition, children's memory of knowledge depends on concrete objects, teachers or parents should communicate with children in simple English as much as possible, and connect with objects, such as Educators pick up an Apple to explain the word "apple", when this scene appears many times, children will naturally associate the two, and the next time they hear the word, they can quickly find the corresponding item. Teachers can also teach through intuitive movements, expressions, or images. Intuitive thinking means that children must understand and express language through intuitive actions, expressions, pictures, or specific situations. For example, every morning the teacher greets the children with "Good morning" in English. Through repeated observation, the children who have just entered kindergarten can gradually establish the connection between this sentence and life and slowly understand this sentence. This intuitive way of thinking makes language learning natural for children [10]. They are not aware that they are learning a language, but they will take the initiative to understand and express language to communicate information and emotions with others. They also do not think about what language is during the communication process. Secondly, break the silence phenomenon in children's language learning. Although children perform the related actions by hearing their mother say "Baby laughs," it can take up to a year to learn the words with real meanings. In addition, it may take a long time for a child to learn to speak or use a sentence pattern after hearing it. Children will experience a bottleneck period in the process of learning a language, but time will not be too long. Just like when a child hears "Come here to me", he will not immediately say the same sentence pattern. Only after practice can he say "Come me" or "Come to me" or "Come here to me". Then establish children's initiative in learning language. In a language communication environment, when children need to communicate, they will actively search for words and sentences in their memory and try to express them. In this situation of communication needs, when children have understanding barriers in communication due to lack of vocabulary or grammatical errors, children will feel the urgency of learning new words and will consciously use this opportunity to learn from each other and actively imitate.

4.2. Stimulate Children's Interest in Learning

Kong proposed that interest in learning is the intrinsic force that drives people to seek knowledge. For children, the content of learning is often biased towards their preferences, although children show great interest in a new language at the beginning, they cannot concentrate on it because of their weak will. Therefore, to stimulate children's interest in learning, teachers need to design rich classes, such as English games, to increase interaction. Or play children's favorite cartoons as material to improve children's interest, when children are interested in its content, they will change from passive learning to active learning, and learning English will become easier. In addition, Wan also suggested that

teachers should maintain a good image in daily communication with children, such as giving appropriate rewards to children's progress, which will help them enhance their confidence in learning English [11].

4.3. Encourage and Praise mainly as Evaluation of Children

Hu's behaviorist reinforcement perspective proposes that good results have a reinforcing effect on behavior, which means that such results have a positive reinforcing effect on behavior, whereas unpleasant results have a negative reinforcing effect on behavior. In actual teaching, positive reinforcement and negative reinforcement correspond to praise and punishment, but the important goal is to cultivate children's interest in learning English. Teachers should often use tangible and intangible encouragement methods to strengthen students' positive responses. Tangible ways include material rewards, verbal praise from teachers, and praise from all peers for children who have done well. Young children usually encounter some difficulties when learning English. Some children may lose confidence or even develop feelings of disgust and resistance when learning English because they are young but must master a certain amount of English vocabulary. At this time, tangible rewards can undoubtedly increase their confidence and interest in learning English. There are also many intangible encouragements. For example, a smile or a look from the teacher, an envious expression from a peer, etc. will all affect the effectiveness of children's English learning. Current children's English teaching places special emphasis on emotional factors. Brightly colored and beautiful classrooms, nice songs, happy games, and teachers' expressive body language can easily introduce students to the world of English [12].

4.4. "Small Steps" Teaching Method

Dong mentioned that the teaching method proposed by Skinner has certain significance for educational guidance. That is, a general course is divided into several small goals, from easy to difficult, students through the completion of small steps can clearly understand their learning status, even if they can give feedback and strengthen their shortcomings [13]. However, children's physical and psychological development is not complete, resulting in children focusing on one thing for a long time, so through the use of small-step teaching, that is, children only take one step at a time, and each step is given reinforcement so that children can actively learn, but also step by step to cultivate their interest in learning English [1]. So this approach has great significance and results for children.

5. Conclusions

In this review, the current teaching of children's English is still affected by the behaviorist teaching concept. Teacher-centered "operable" practice inspires children to produce organic behaviors and encourages timely reinforcement. Behaviorism has had a significant influence on teaching English to children and has improved teaching from the perspectives of children's physiological and psychological traits, conventional educational principles, and the features of children's learning of a second language.

The teaching philosophy of behaviorism is in line with children's physical and psychological characteristics. It examines children's behavior objectively, improves teaching objectives, stays away from the subjectivity and abstraction of curriculum objectives, and creates a highly operable curriculum in every way, from objectives to execution. The praise mechanism advocated by behaviorism also greatly improves children's interest in learning English. The teaching philosophy of behaviorism has penetrated children's English teaching behavior. This review recommends taking advantage of the behavioral teaching concept to formulate more flexible children's English learning strategies and make correct analyses and improvements to better guide children's English teaching.

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