

A Comparative Study of Zebra English and You Mei English Courses

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Abstract. Under the background of Internet + education, online education is booming. In order to abandon the traditional English education mode and let children accept more pure English, many parents begin to try to choose online English courses. However, there are many kinds of children's English courses on the market, so how to choose a high-quality course brand among the dazzling brands has become the top priority. After tracking and observing a variety of online English brands in the past two years, this paper finally selected two relatively representative online English courses, Zebra English and You Mei English, for comparison and analysis, and suggested that You Mei English should introduce AI technology to design interactive scene animation of real people. It is not necessary to set the reading link in the first-level courses of Zebra English. Children's games and operation components should be added to Zebra English, and daily unlocking task points should be added to Zebra English. Zebra English is more suitable for zero-basis enlightenment, and You Mei English can be added as a supplement in the later stage.

Keywords: Online education, early childhood English, Zebra English, You Mei English.

1. Introduction

In recent years, English, as a universal language, has been occupying a hegemonic position. In order to be in line with the world, China has always taken English test scores as one of the hard indicators for all kinds of college entrance exams, and students have made great efforts in English learning in order to win various customs exams. However, due to the weak teaching staff in China, the lack of educational resources and the lack of language environment, the students can only learn English by memorizing words, memorizing grammar painfully and developing difficult training. The purpose of learning is mainly for exams. Because of the violation of the natural law of language learning, although students pay great efforts, the harvest is still "dumb English", and can only "talk on paper". This way of learning not only prematurely discourages most children's interest in English learning, but also wastes a lot of children's time and energy to develop their other interests. For some children, English has even become a stumbling block to higher education, affecting the development of their life. It is really a pity. To this day, the children's English learning difficulties have not been really solved. At present, the post-80s generation has gradually become the main force of the new generation of parents. Most of them have advanced education consciousness. Because they have been deeply poisoned by the traditional English education mode, they hope to abandon traditional English education mode and let their children learn English in the way of natural acquisition as far as possible. They no longer aim to take exams, but see English as a tool. They hope their children can use English as the key to open the door to global vision. However, as China is located in East Asia, it belongs to the "weak context" area in English teaching, without good oral communication conditions [1]. In order to make their children receive pure English, many parents have begun to try to choose English courses online.

Online education, also known as distance online education, refers to the educational form of teaching through the Internet, mobile devices and other communication media [2]. Under the trend of the explosive development of information technology, online education breaks through the limitations of time and space, surpasses the unequal distribution of educational resources caused by regions and other aspects, enables the sharing of educational resources, lowers the threshold of English learning, and enables more people to access more pure English education with lower costs

and conditions [3]. For educatees, online education APP is more suitable for user experience and more humanized. It makes up for the irreversibility of traditional teaching classrooms and can provide unlimited repeated learning [4]. However, there are many kinds of children's English courses on the market. How to choose a good English course among the dazzling brands has become a big problem for parents. After two years of tracking and observation of a variety of online English courses, this paper finally selects two relatively representative online English courses for comparison and analysis, summarizes the advantages and disadvantages of the two courses and provides suggestions for parents' choice.

2. An Overview of Zebra English and You Mei English

In this paper, Zebra English and You Mei English are selected for comparative analysis. Through research, it is found that most online English courses and Zebra English have almost the same curriculum model and knowledge system. For example, animation forms and listening, speaking, reading and writing are designed in both of them. However, the difference is that Zebra English has clearer pictures, more interesting animation content, and more exquisite picture books, which are more in line with children's age characteristics. Therefore, the author selected Zebra English as the research object. Different from Zebra English in many products of the same type, there are very few gamified curriculum models such as You Mei English. By observing children's reactions after experiencing, You Mei English, the author finds that this learning mode of You Mei English is particularly attractive to children, so the author chooses You Mei English and Zebra English for comparison.

2.1. Zebra English

Zebra English is a local English AI class brand launched in 2017, mainly for children aged 2 to 8. Zebra English is mainly based on AI technology, which combines human foreign teachers from North America and cartoon images in the same real scene to create a virtual but almost real language scene and realize the transformation of traditional offline immersion teaching into online immersion learning with learners as the main body [5]. Through various contents such as interesting animation, beautiful children's songs, and exquisite picture books, the course contents have features of scenes, games, interaction, novelty and interest. Immersed in English language situations, children participate in video interaction by watching with eyes, touching with fingers, listening with ears, speaking with the mouth, etc., to realize virtual immersion learning, which also stimulates the internal motivation of children's learning. In the process of continuous edification, children can imperceptibly acquire the common basic vocabulary, get familiar with its correct pronunciation, and gradually form English thinking. Zebra English is now mainly divided into S1, S2, S3, S4 and S5 levels. Content design of different levels has inherent logical relations, and each level constitutes a relatively complete English learning system. After the successful purchase of courses, the system will automatically issue course links every day, Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday to learn new content, Thursday comprehensive review, and Friday interactive learning, which not only helps parents and children adhere to, cultivate children's good learning habits, but also in line with Ebbinghaus forgetting curve, help children timely review, overcome the law of forgetting.

2.2. You Mei English

You Mei English is a situational immersion interactive English brand launched in 2018. It is a set of scientific online interactive and learning courses created by a team of linguists from Columbia University for children from countries where English is not their native language. It is suitable for children from 3 to 15 years old. Its design concept is based on the principle of learning to apply, featuring gamified content design, so that children can naturally learn English in a fully immersed and interactive English environment. First of all, You Mei English selects 500 English topics that are suitable for children's age characteristics and close to children's life from the original American

graded books RAZ. Secondly, more than 10,000 animation courses of real-life scenes in the United States have been carefully simulated and designed. Finally, You Mei English presents the curriculum content of every level in the form of games, allowing children to learn by themselves in the way of games, which protects and stimulates the fun of learning English to a great extent, improves the concentration of children's learning, and makes children free from any burden in the whole learning process. Gamification is defined as "the use of game design elements in a non-game context" to solve real problems and improve happiness through the power of games. This view is recognized by many scholars in academia and industry [4]. There are twelve levels of You Mei English. Each level contains 24 lessons and level tests, and each lesson contains 7 links. With a scientific and perfect English system, English words and sentences can be reproduced and repeated in different contexts through a spiral cycle, fundamentally solving the problems of memory forgetting and boring review.

3. Comparison between Zebra English and You Mei English

3.1. Similarities between Zebra English and You Mei English

3.1.1 The same concept of course design

Zebra English and You Mei English have almost the same concept of design. They try to create a virtual online language scene to immerse children in this English environment and enable them to acquire English naturally by immersion and imperceptibly. The original meaning of "immersion" is "to soak", later cited as "to fill with..." or "completely in a state or mental activity". Context is the situation, including the conversation object, time, place, topic and so on. Through experiments, Eskildsen found that context has the function of activating foreign language expression. That is to say, if people have used a language form in the interactive context, then the reproduced context can help us recall the language form [6]. The acquisition is an invisible, unconscious absorption. Every child is a genius at language acquisition. No matter what language environment they are placed in, they can unconsciously and naturally absorb and communicate to master the language. Children's brains have considerable potential and obvious advantages in language imitation and speech discrimination, so it is a good choice to design an effective language environment to stimulate children's potential in language learning [7].

3.1.2 The same rules of course design

Zebra English and You Mei English both follow the language learning rules of "listening, speaking, reading, writing" and combine sound and picture well. English enlightenment is "English sound enlightenment". First of all, to establish children's English phonetic system, from the perspective of language learning, is to establish the direct correspondence between sound and image or scene [8]. Research on linguistic psychology shows that children acquire language in a process from image thinking to abstract thinking. In early childhood, children mainly rely on the concrete images of things in their minds to think, so they establish a direct connection between language and the things it describes in their brains, and then form the relationship between language signs and meanings [9]. The better the corresponding relationship is, the better children's understanding of speech sounds will be, and the easier it will be to achieve natural acquisition.

3.2. Differences between Zebra English and You Mei English

3.2.1 Different technologies used in the course

Zebra English uses AI technology in combination with English courses to create virtual but almost real animated scenes with stories. You Mei English does not use AI technology. The course content is a relatively independent dynamic picture; the story is poor, and there is no real human interaction and participation.

3.2.2 Different emphasis on listening, speaking, reading and writing

The course design of each level of Zebra English includes listening, speaking, reading and writing links. Although the order of these links varies slightly at different levels, there is no great change on the whole. However, the first four levels of You Mei English are almost not designed for children to follow reading, but focus on listening. There are only some follow-through sessions, but even so, the team of Columbian linguists says they are unnecessary because they believe in the rules of children's language learning. After a lot of repeated listening, children will naturally move out of the silence and into the spontaneous expression stage.

3.2.3 Different ways of course design

Zebra English includes six parts: video, word, story, speaking, writing and quiz. Only in quizzes, there are operation parts, and the other parts are mainly for children to watch and listen to. And You Mei English every link, every knowledge point of learning lets children play games and interactive operations. Children are active in operational activities, using both hands and minds. Through operation activities, they have direct feelings, enrich their experience and get satisfaction, thus stimulating children to think positively and explore bravely, and forming excellent personality qualities [10]. Therefore, this way of learning by playing can arouse children's learning interest and concentration.

3.2.4 The amount of knowledge set for each class is different

Zebra English contains fewer new knowledge points per class, while You Mei English contains more knowledge points per class. The course design of Zebra English is more from the simple to the deep, step-by-step characteristics; each lesson is less capacity; the focus of learning is more prominent; zero basic English children learn more easily. You Mei English's every section of the design is more information; the focus of learning is not prominent enough; zero foundation children may be a little difficult.

3.2.5 Different ways of course delivery

The system of Zebra English will automatically unlock new courses every day. After learning the courses, the star will turn yellow, while the star of the unlearned courses will remain gray. In this way, it can be very clear to judge whether the courses of the day are completed, which is helpful for children to adhere to every day and develop good learning habits. In contrast, You Mei English delivered 588 courses at one time. The advantage of one-off delivery is that parents and children can decide the number of courses to be learned every day according to their own acceptability. But there is no daily unlock learning task design. It is not easy to arouse children's attention.

4. Conclusion

By sorting out the similarities and differences between Zebra English and You Mei English, the author summarized the advantages and disadvantages of the two English brands.

4.1. You Mei English should introduce AI technology to design interactive scene animations of real people

You Mei English should adopt AI technology to design virtual animations close to real scenes, create richer and more coherent language scenes, increase the story and interest of children's English learning, and help children to have a holistic understanding of language.

4.2. Not necessary to set the following reading section for Zebra English Level 1 Courses

Linguist Krashen believes that children have to go through four processes in acquiring their mother tongue: the silence period, the grammar interference period, the improvement period and the ascending period. The "silence period" takes about one year, and children usually do not speak before the age of one year. During this period, children need to experience a lot of "listening" experience,

and only after one year can they be guided and stimulated by a lot of language from people around them. The same rule that starts with simple words and progresses to complete sentences also applies to second language acquisition. If the children are forced to read and imitate in the stage of children's enlightenment, and even some parents if they find that the children's imitation is not ideal, they will force the children to train again and again. It will destroy their enthusiasm and sense of achievement of children in learning English. In the early stage of learning English, the most important thing for children is to listen a lot, and parents need to wait patiently for the flowers to blossom.

The courses in Zebra English include animation and picture stories, which are preferred by children. However, due to the lack of operability, most children feel that their interest in Zebra English is fading after a period of learning. Therefore, Zebra English can learn from the gamification characteristics of You Mei English and add interactive operation components to enhance the fun of children's English learning.

4.3. You Mei English Should Add a Link to Unlock Quest Points Every Day

If all English courses are distributed to parents and children at once, learners will not pay enough attention to the course learning. You Mei English can learn from Zebra English's daily push to help children and parents stick to learning every day and accumulate over time.

4.4. Zebra English Is More Suitable for Zero-based Enlightenment; You Mei English Can Be Added As a Supplement in the Later Stage

Parents can use Zebra English for initiation in the early stage, and after one or two years of initiation, they can join You Mei English course as a supplement, which not only meets the story and integrity, but also meets the operability and interest of learning.

In general, both kinds of English brands have their advantages and disadvantages, and there is still a lot of room for improvement in the professional field. If enterprises want to stand out in the army of online education brands and attract more parents to choose, they need to polish their own course quality more carefully, and constantly optimize the course content.

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