

Early English Education in an Immersion Program: Perceptions of English Kindergarten Teachers and Parents

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This study explored teachers' and parents' perceptions in Korean English kindergarten regarding early English education, teaching and learning environment, English kindergarten teachers, and the teaching method. It was conducted in an English kindergarten in Daejeon, Korea. Qualitative design method was used in the study. Data was collected through the interviews with native-speaking teachers, Korean teachers, and parents. The results of the study show that early English education is effective for Korean children, and it does not have negative influence on the children's Korean acquisition. This study also revealed that content-based instruction is appropriate for children's English improvement, and teaching Western culture does not disturb the children's identity formation, rather enriches their knowledge. In addition, both native-speaking teachers and Korean teacher need to have collaboration for successful language education. In addition, teacher training program is suggested for better curriculum and teacher development.

[early English education/English kindergarten/content-based instruction/조기영어교육/영어유치원/내용기반교육]

I. INTRODUCTION

English is one of the most important means for acquiring access to the world's intellectual and technical resources. Therefore, to participate in globalization, needless to say, people need to communicate with others in English, which has

already established its status as a global language. As its status grows, the interest in English education increases rapidly all over the world. Formal English education begins from third grade in Korean elementary school. As a result of such governmental English education policy, a number of parents are more concerned than ever about their children's English acquisition. Today, over 80% of kindergartens in Korea have English classes (Hee-Kyu Kim, Byeong-cheon Lee, & Joong-Sun Sohn, 2008). Also, increasing numbers of children study English at private institutions called 'HakWon' before they enter elementary schools. In addition, there are private English kindergartens where English is taught in immersion language learning environment.

However, there are pros and cons of early English education. According to Yong-Joo Jung (2003), the effect of early English education is very positive to most Korean children, and the period of preschool is appropriate for foreign language acquisition. Zhao and Morgan (2004) investigated the consideration of age in second language acquisition. They concluded that "earlier is better" for the second language acquisition. On the other hand, the opposing Korean researchers of early English educations discuss children's confusion in that early English education may bring conflict between Korean culture and Western culture (Dong-seok Choi, 2006; Hyunoo Lee, 2006). Also, they emphasize that the acquisition of mother tongue is disturbed by English education.

Despite the fact that supportive opinions on early English education still coexist with opposite ones, many countries including Korea have already adopted it. However, current studies focus mainly on improvement for English education at the elementary schools (Jung Hee Hwang, 2001; Young-Cheon Park, 2002). The research on early English education in Korea is rarely achieved considering that the introduction of early English education has been introduced to very young children. In the studies on bilingual education in other countries, immersion programs are proved to be an effective model for children's language acquisition as well as learning content knowledge (Cummins, 1989; Freeman & Freeman, 1992; Met, 1994). In such programs, children attain higher levels of proficiency in language at the same time they develop academic and cognitive competence. Korean schools such as Young Hoon elementary school and other private English kindergartens already implemented these programs and children are taught by

immersion teachers in content-based classes (Moon Eun Joo, 2002).

This study will explore the current situation of English kindergarten by means of interviews with native speaking English kindergarten teachers, Korean teachers and parents whose children attend English kindergarten. The main research questions are as follows: 1. How do the teachers and the parents perceive early English education in an immersion program of Korean English kindergarten? 2. What is the current situation of English kindergarten in Korea regarding English teachers, the teaching method, and the teaching and learning environment?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Early English Education and English Kindergarten

Since a language can not be acquired in the short term, parents want their children to be prepared in their earliest years. In parallel with such a social trend, more and more kindergartens or preschools implement English education, and children are exposed to English learning in and out of the classroom (Eun Joo Moon, 2002). Young-Ye Park and Jeong-Mi Song (2000) in their survey found that almost all parents were positive about starting English education early and considered the optimal age for starting English education at around four years old. There are several forms of early English education in Korea.

The most common types of teaching are *Hag-Seb-Ji*, English classes in kindergartens, and English only kindergartens. Sung-Hui Cheong and Dong Hoon Lee (2003) claim that one type of early English education is *Hag-Seb-Ji* such as Yoon's English, Tun-Tun English, etc. These are practice books which are taught by visiting tutors. They contain phonics, vocabulary flash cards, simple sentence patterns, games, songs, pictures, and other learning activities. A teacher who belongs to the *Hag-Seb-Ji* company visits the student's home once a week. With textbooks, he/she teaches English to the student usually for 20-30 minutes. English classes in kindergartens usually take twenty minutes, and the teachers are visiting tutors like those in the *Hag-Seb-Ji*. They go to kindergartens to teach English 2-3 times per week. The classes aim to arouse children's interests in

learning English (Dong-Bin Jeong, 2004). However, there are no constant texts or well-fixed curriculums (Jae-Young Choi, 2007). Consequently, English classes in kindergartens need to implement content-based instruction and develop curriculum (Jae-Young Choi, 2007; Kyoung Woo Lee, C. C. Merrill, Eun-hwa Lee, Hyang-rim Kwak, Youn-seung Lee, & Ji-hyoung Jeon, 2004). While English classes in kindergartens do not have a specific instruction, English kindergartens attempt to provide a concrete curriculum for early English education.

English kindergartens started in Korea around 1992. The first English kindergartens were ECC and Wonderland. Since the opening them, a number of English kindergartens such as SLP, EWAS, LCI Kids Club, Kids College, and Poly School have been expanding rapidly around big cities. Actually, these are registered as private language institutes, not English kindergartens. However, it is common for them to be called English kindergarten. Usually, English kindergartens grow in the form of franchise. (Ji-In Cha, 2003). These English kindergartens have self-developed, systematic programs for the children of different age groups. Nevertheless, they have a lot in common. Children over 36 months old are allowed, and school hours are approximately from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. All the children are taught English at least 4 hours a day by native-speaking teachers and Korean teachers who can fluently communicate in English. Although there are small variations in each English kindergarten, native-speaking teachers usually teach phonics, art, music, and reading story books while Korean teachers teach English text books, math, and science. The whole classes and conversations at English kindergartens are accomplished by only English. By doing so, children learn all the subjects in English through meaningful situation and relevant activities. This process decreases any uneasiness or anxiety towards English itself. From the beginning of the program, children learn the content of the class through English. With this variety of experience, their English abilities markedly improve (Young-Jin Kim, 2000).

English kindergartens in Korea that implement immersion programs adopt whole language approach (Freeman & Freeman, 1992) as their teaching philosophy. They do not separate English from other subjects because English is a tool for learning other subjects like math, science, social studies, art, etc. This indicates content-based instruction, through which children can naturally acquire English as

well as other subjects (Young-Jin Kim, 2000). Hae-sook Kwon (2005) reports that Korean parents prefer English kindergartens because children are exposed to a natural and rich language learning environment using songs, games, and stories. This instruction focuses on improving children's communicative competence. Children come in contact with western culture unconsciously through interaction with their native-speaking teachers.

2. Critical Period Hypothesis

The Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH) is the major theoretical basis for early English education and a popular way of analyzing the differences between the apparent success of children and failure of adults in second language acquisition (Hakuta, Bialystok, & Wiley, 2003; Jin Ok Hong, 1994; Johnson & Newport, 1989). When teaching English in elementary school was introduced in Korea in 1997, the theoretical basis was the CPH (Soo-Woong Ahn, 2001). It centers on almost discussions about the relationship between age and language acquisition. Researchers like Lenneberg (1967) and Bickerton (1981) emphasize that there is a biological timetable when language can be acquired more easily and beyond which time language is increasingly difficult to acquire. Such a biological timetable indicates the CPH. According to this assertion, the critical period for second language acquisition occurs before puberty, beyond which people seem to be relatively incapable of easily acquiring a second language. Ellis (1997) states the critical period appears to be much earlier at around six years of age. Sepassi (2006) also mentioned that children's brains are more efficient in processing language due to a greater flexibility, or plasticity, as compared to those of adults'. Considering that the purpose of English education focuses on communication and fluency in language, it is obvious that earlier age is effective for acquiring English.

A body of research on the phonology of a foreign language supports the notion of a critical period (Birdsong, 1999; Hurford & Kirby, 1999; Singleton, 2005). According to Cameron (2004), children who receive early English education take advantage of acquiring language skills. Listening comprehension and pronunciation benefit most from early education. Brown (2007) claims that

individuals beyond the age of puberty do not acquire what has come to be called authentic or native-speaker pronunciation of the second language because this phenomenon is caused by age-based factors such as neuromuscular plasticity, cerebral development, sociobiological programs and the environment of sociocultural influences. Singleton (2005) points out that pronunciation is one area where ‘the younger, the better’ assumption clearly seems to have validity. Doo-Bon Bae (2002) asserts that there is a critical period in acquisition of pronunciation. Although good pronunciation is not the sole criterion that determines language success, it is one of the most important components of success in second language acquisition because it basically influences every other element in language acquisition. Additionally, Eun Joo Moon (2002) emphasizes that Korean English researchers need to focus more on teaching pronunciation in early English education and, thus, need to place more native speakers in elementary schools and kindergartens.

In terms of affective consideration of language acquisition, Brown (2007) insists that young children are more ego-centric than adults, who are more sensitive to the outside world and develop more language ego. Therefore, children are less sensitive to errors in a foreign language. According to Yong-Joo Jung (2003), very young children who have not developed cognitively enough to possess attitudes toward races, cultures and languages may be less affected than adults. Bialystok and Hakuta (1999) discuss that when children start acquiring a second language at a very early age, their native language has not fully developed yet and their linguistic systems are not as established as adult learners. Children do not seem to be disturbed by the first language. Less interference from the native language allows the children to reach a higher level of proficiency in second language learning.

III. RESEARCH METHOD

The purpose of this study is to explore the current situation of English kindergarten in Korea regarding teachers’ quality, the teaching method, and classroom environment. This study also examines how the teachers and the

parents of English kindergartens perceive early English education. As mentioned earlier, the studies about Korean English kindergartens are rare in spite of the fact that there is a great demand in early English education (Jae-Young Choi, 2007; Eun Joo Moon, 2002; Young-Ye Park & Jeong-Mi Song, 2000). According to Creswell (2003), when a concept or phenomenon needs to be understood because little research has been done on it, it merits a qualitative approach. Therefore, the researchers selected the qualitative research design for this study.

1. Subjects

The participants in this study are ten English teachers in an English Kindergarten in Daejeon and five mothers whose children attend the English kindergarten. Among ten English teachers, five of them are native-speaking teachers who are three Canadians and two Australians, and the others are Korean English teachers. The teachers are eight females and two males who are native-speaking teachers, ranging in age from the late twenties to late forties. The experience level in English kindergarten for native-speaking teachers ranges from more than one year to three years. The Korean teachers' experience ranges from two years to eight years. All the Korean female teachers have a bachelor's degree related to English. Two of them took TESOL program. All the native-speaking English teachers also have a bachelor's degree, but their majors are each different and have no connection with English or children's education. Five mothers sent their children to English kindergartens for three years. Their children, who are seven years old, have attended the English kindergarten since the age of five years old. Among the five mothers, two mothers have sent two children to the English kindergarten. The information of teachers and parents is shown in Table 1 and Table 2 below.

2. The Research Site

The teachers and mothers who participated in this study are involved in the same kindergarten. This kindergarten is located in Daejeon and it has twenty-six franchises in Korea. It has a seven-story building and is equipped with a library,

Table 1
Information of Kindergarten English teachers

Teachers	Nationality	Age	Sex	Teaching Experience (year)
Mark	Canadian	42	M	3
Abby	Canadian	27	F	2
Rick	Canadian	48	M	3
Joanne	Australian	41	F	2
Christine	Australian	28	F	1
Minjung	Korean	33	F	3
Joeun	Korean	39	F	5
Lucia	Korean	26	F	3
Judy	Korean	28	F	2
Soomin	Korean	40	F	8

Table 2
Information of Parents

Parents	Age	Sex	Children's Age
Jungmin's mother	35	F	7 & 5
Eunji's mother	34	F	7
Jihae's mother	36	F	7
Boram's mother	38	F	7
Sejun's mother	40	F	7 & 10

cafeteria, indoor playground, audio-visual classrooms, and auditorium. Each class has twelve students. There are two big tables in each classroom and six students sit together around each table. All around the wall, students' works such as drawings and letters are on display. The English Kindergarten has a self-developed immersion program for children between 5-7 years old. The school hours are from 9:30 a.m. to 2:45 p.m. and about 5 classes including activities are taught a day. Native-speaking teachers and Korean teachers teach classes in English except playground activity which is the last class of the day. The whole program of this kindergarten is based on content-based instruction that enables children to be exposed to natural language learning environment. Concurrently with using English, children learn other subjects and activities such as reading,

storytelling, song and chant, phonics, theme room, math, science, art and music, physical education, and social-studies. Children start learning writing from 7 years old. In the case of seven-year-old children who have attended for three years, four native-speaking teachers and one Korean teacher teach them. Each teacher is in charge of his/her own subject. Although the teachers' majors are not relevant to their subject, the selection of the subjects is determined by the teachers' interests and their capabilities. Class teachers are usually Korean teachers, because they need to meet and talk with the students' parents and to build a well-harmonized relationship between native-speaking teachers and students who need help in communication.

3. Data Collection and Analysis

In this qualitative research, the interview is the main source of data. Patton (2002) discusses the interview guide approach. Topics and issues are specified in advance, but the interviewer will decide the sequencing and wording during the interview. The outline allows the collection of data to be somewhat systematic for each participant, and if there are gaps, they can be anticipated and closed. The interview should remain fairly conversational and situational. Data for this study was collected from September to November in 2006. The face to face interviews were taken between thirty minutes and one hour. In the case of English teachers, the researcher visited their kindergarten and interviewed them. For the five mothers, the researcher met them individually at their house. Based on research questions, the researcher allowed the participants to talk freely unless they strayed from the interview questions. The interview questions were distributed to participants before they were interviewed in order to give them time to think. After the interviews had been finished, the researcher asked the participants for secondary interview for additional questioning. The interviews with Korean English teachers and parents were conducted in Korean, and the result was transcribed into English. All the interviews were audio taped and documented for the data analysis.

To analyze the data, the researcher followed the procedure of Creswell's (2003) coding. It involves "taking text data or pictures, segmenting sentences or images

into categories, and labeling those categories with a term, often a term based in the actual language of the participant (p. 192)." Therefore, the researchers categorized all the interviewees' responses into groups which were connected with the research questions. Throughout this process, similar patterns were grouped into categories, which were connected with the research questions. As a consequence, the researcher could find which themes are remarkable. Maxwell (2005) suggests triangulation collects information from a diverse range of individuals and settings with a variety of methods. To avoid threats to the validity of the qualitative conclusions derived from data analysis, the researchers prepared written interview questions while collecting the data and showed them to participants. In addition, the researchers solicited feedback about the data from the participants for member checking. The participants examined the researchers' rough drafts of writing, in which their noticeable remarks are recorded.

IV. RESULTS

The results of this study are divided into four categories: English Kindergarten teachers' and parents' perceptions regarding English education, English kindergarten teachers, the teaching method, and teaching and learning environment.

1. Perceptions of Early English Education

For the purpose of exploring the interviewees' perceptions about early English education, the researcher prepared the interview questions which dealt with agreement or disagreement of early English education, the effectiveness of English kindergarten, the interrelation between early English education and Korean language acquisition, and so on. Consequently, it was revealed that most of the interviewees supported early English education and were affirmative about the effects of English kindergarten. Moreover, they did not regard early English education as an obstacle of Korean language acquisition.

1) The Earlier Is The Better

All the interviewees agreed with early English education, and they responded that the earlier the English education starts, the more effective it is. These responses were based on two perspectives: considerations of critical period hypothesis and the importance of English education caused by globalization:

I agree with early English education because when children have early exposure to another language, they seem to have less difficulty in retaining what they have learned. This is because their minds have not been set and are more able to grasp concepts. They are more like sponge on English education. (Joanne, September 20, 2006)

A child can acquire the correct pronunciation from native speakers. The older they are, they are likely to start to lose ability to hear the differences in pronunciation. The younger they are, it is easier to understand the differences in pronunciation. (Mark, September 19, 2006)

The young children don't think of their learning as a study or a kind of subjects. English learning for them implies a natural acquisition and they are less stressful than older students in learning English. Besides, their ability of English communication is much better than the older students'. (Minjung, September 25, 2006)

Native-speaking teachers refer to the first perspective and are concerned with neurological and phonological considerations in second language acquisition. Joanne, an Australian teacher, indicates that young children take advantage of learning English because of their flexible brains. Mark, a Canadian teacher, asserts that young children are the better experts than adults in acquiring English pronunciation. And the Korean teacher's response that conveys a cognitive consideration proves that the young children do not know they are learning a language, while the older students are always aware of it. Whereas almost all of the interviewees have the same perspective for supporting early English education, some mothers, who also agreed with it, had a different point of view:

I agree with early English education. Nowadays, English is an official language

all over the world. To survive in the age of globalization, learning English is inevitable. Also English education in elementary school has been already started in Korea. For this reason, many children go to English kindergartens. To keep up with them in competition, my child has to learn English as earlier as possible. (Jungmin's mother, October 2, 2006)

These days, people who don't have English ability are likely to be treated as an incompetent person. Even worse, they can't enter a college and get a job. So, early English education is an unavoidable reality, because English can't be acquired in a short period. (Eunji's mother, October 9, 2006)

This data illustrates how much importance these mothers place on English education. Although they agree to early English education, they insist that learning English well is an unavoidable reality rather than a choice in the age of globalization.

2) First Language Interference in Early English Education

To investigate the influence of early English education on the Korean language acquisition, the researchers asked the Korean teachers and parents questions regarding first language interference in early English education, their perception of their children's Korean ability compared to other children who attend usual kindergarten, and how their children study Korean. As a consequence, the participants believed that early English education did not disturb the children's Korean language acquisition. Furthermore, children's Korean ability in the English kindergarten was not behind others children in usual kindergarten. In response to the question that asks about their children's Korean language education, three mothers answered that a visiting tutor in a *Hag-Seb-Ji* company teaches Korean to their children once a week:

Because this is Korea, children acquire Korean very naturally and unconsciously. In my daughter's case, her Korean is much better than her friends'. Among 7 years old children who go to usual kindergarten, I saw many of them can't read and write Korean very well. I think children's

language acquisition is determined by their own intellectual faculties, not by the types of kindergartens. On the contrary, a child who is good at English is successful in studying Korean. (Jihae's mother, October 9, 2006)

My daughter is not inferior to other friends in studying Korean. But anyway, I have had a worry because she has attended English kindergarten. So, I tried to read many books to my daughter and let her study Korean with visiting teacher of Hag-Seb-Ji company. (Boram's mother, October 1, 2006)

As described here, early English education does not interrupt children from acquiring Korean because children in Korea are exposed to more Korean than English. The excerpts from the interviews with mothers prove it, even though Boram's mother has been worried about a possible negative influence from early English education. Especially, the opinion of Jihae's mother that studying English is helpful for acquiring Korean is noticeable.

2. Perceptions of English Kindergarten Teachers

1) The Reciprocal Assistance of Native-speaking Teachers and Korean Teachers

In the English kindergarten, both native-speaking teachers and Korean teachers have their own advantages and disadvantages in teaching English to children. The result of interviews show that Korean teachers were good at students' management due to sharing the same culture with the children. In terms of English proficiency, native-speaking teachers surpassed Korean teachers; however, a native-speaking teacher, Mark states that the possession of Korean culture is Korean teachers' advantage, while it represents a drawback for native-speaking teachers:

In English kindergarten, native teachers and Korean teachers are both important. Native teachers' merits are pronunciation and speaking. For demerits, we don't have ability to explain difficult concepts. Sometimes, Korean teachers give very short explanation in Korean to children so that children easily get the meaning. However, it's hard for native speakers to explain difficult concept in Korean.

(Mark, September 19, 2006)

Usually, Korean teachers can't express English very well as native teachers. Especially, the most difficult thing is that I can't correctly pronounce all vowels and letters. Nevertheless, I have ability to communicate in two languages. So, I can easily catch the children's mind. (Jooun, September 18, 2006)

I prefer the Korean teachers' education style that is well matched with our culture to native teachers'. At the same time, I prefer the native teachers' English pronunciation to Korean teachers'. (Jungmin's mother, October 2, 2006)

These three excerpts demonstrate that Korean teachers and native-speaking teachers are necessary for English kindergarten, and they should cooperate with each other. Native-speaking teachers can provide their students with correct English pronunciation and various ways of speaking which are the weaknesses of Korean teachers. On the other hand, Korean teachers can facilitate children's English learning by sharing the same cultural emotion. They agreed that both native-speaking teachers and Korean teachers should mutually cooperate for the successful language teaching.

2) Classroom Management

From the interview, the researchers could find out some issues related to classroom management: the level difference, the use of students' first language, and keeping students' interests during the class. The first issue stems from the problem of children's language level difference. Even though a class is made up of twelve children who started to learn English simultaneously, all the children can not have the same English ability. Both native-speaking teachers and Korean teachers struggled with the students' level difference:

It is really hard for me to keep interested in class with a group of different levels. Once again, if a group is made up of students with different levels, it's very hard for teachers to make a balance. (Mark, September 19, 2006)

The teacher added that it was very difficult to decide on which level he should focus in class. According to him, if he concentrates on the children of advanced level during the class, it would be very hard for the other students who are not advanced. For this reason, English kindergarten teachers have difficulty in maintaining the balance of classroom. Therefore, some Korean teachers permitted students to use Korean occasionally when they had difficulty in classroom interactions with students. On the contrary, native-speaking teachers disagreed with the students' use of Korean in classroom:

The rule in here is "no Korean." However, when a student has a big trouble in expressing his/her opinion, I call the student individually and allow him/her to use Korean to solve the problem. (Minjung, September 25, 2006)

If the first language is spoken, students will become less enthusiastic and tend to rely on the first language more. They can become lazy if allowed to rely on the first language translation. (Christine, September 16, 2006)

Students in the English Kindergarten should speak only in English. Teachers in the English kindergarten don't allow students to use Korean. However, it is difficult for very young Korean children to use only English for several hours. Considering this problem, Minjung, a Korean teacher, accepted the use of Korean by a student who is only beginning to learn English. According to Christine, a native-speaking teacher, allowing the use of Korean leads students to depend on the Korean language. Since the students' primary goal is to learn English, such an allowance is not helpful for students' success. From this, as regards the use of first language, both positive opinion and opposite opinion coexisted.

Another issue in class management is keeping students' interest. Children are active learners and their attention span is usually short. They are unwilling to participate in class without interests. Therefore, teachers should consistently keep students' interests:

The most difficult thing in kindergarten is classroom management. Keeping materials as fun as possible without losing its educational purpose is important.

Children enjoy fun activities. But, if the class too much focuses on funny things, the effect of the class is likely to be low. However, we cannot deny any funny activities, because children must be bored without interests. (Abby, September 21, 2006)

Concentrating children's interests in the class is very important. Teachers stated that creating funny and enjoyable activities is difficult for English kindergarten teachers, because it needs a lot of time and effort. They point out the balance of funny activities and their educational effects. Emphasizing the children's interests excessively leads the class to fail in achieving educational effect. During the interviews with teachers, it is discovered that they do not regularly receive teacher training in the English kindergarten. Consequently, in-service teacher programs may solve student management issues that teachers face in the language classroom.

3. Perceptions of Teaching Method

1) Content-based Instruction

The English kindergarten implements content-based instruction. Accordingly, students learn all the subjects such as math, science, art, music, physical education, and social studies in English. It is discovered that content-based instruction is appropriate for students' English improvement. Through content-based instruction, children acquire English naturally as well as other subjects:

Children learn all the subjects including English by using English. Especially, science is the children's most favorite class. Usual Korean students think of science as a difficult subject. But in here, my students like science very much, because they can participate in the class by conducting an experiment directly. Therefore, they are interested in the science class. They can acquire English naturally and consciously. (Lucia, September 26, 2006)

In social studies class, children plant some peppers or lettuce in a pot. They

also raise a snail and often take field trips with teachers. They learn cultures of other countries. All these things are sufficient to attract children's attention. Thus, children can study a variety of social aspects as well as English. (Lucia, September 26, 2006)

Content-based instruction provides the students with meaningful situation and relevant activities (Pinter, 2006). For example, in science class, students make an experiment by themselves, and they can satisfy their curiosity to a certain scientific phenomenon. Subsequently, it continues to develop the students' English ability. Social studies class makes the students participate in various activities. By providing many relevant activities for the students, teachers can maintain the students' interest in class. In parallel with increasing interests, the children's English ability improves.

2) Class Activities and Teaching Materials

A variety of classroom activities facilitate the children's learning. In the English kindergarten, there were classroom activities such as games, singing, storytelling, dancing, drawing, and so on. All these activities give rise to students' interests and improve the students' English. Especially, it is revealed that a game is the most effective:

My son likes to play games very much in the classroom. One day, I visited the kindergarten to monitor him. He was playing the Bingo game and I watched him speak English very naturally and actively. It seemed that playing a game made my child concentrate more on the class. (Jungmin's mother, October 2, 2006)

Each child's personality decides his/her preference of classroom activity. Therefore, teachers with twelve students should keep a balance of various classroom activities. Meanwhile, all five mothers including Jungmin's mother stated that their children really liked playing games during the class. Most of the teachers also agreed with the mothers. In their opinion, providing a game is very successful in grasping students' attention and interests.

From the interview with teachers, the researcher could discover that both native-speaking teachers and Korean teachers tried to use various materials as many as possible. Among many kinds of materials such as books, toys, markers, pictures, music, or other teaching tools, the teachers used visual materials the most. As to the use of textbook, most of them used the textbooks although they have one textbook for each class:

We use as much as media as possible. We use books, toys, music, nature and other various items. Among them, music, flashcards, pictures, and actual hands on interaction work best. Children like visual things. These materials are likely to hold the students' attention. They are necessary for children's education. (Abby, September 21, 2006)

A class with only using textbook is too boring. I make my own lesson plan without textbook. So, I try to use various materials which can stimulate children's five senses of sight, smell, hearing, taste and touch. (Judy, September 27, 2006)

Teachers emphasized that the visual teaching materials are essential to children's education because they can easily attain the students' attention. Visual materials increase the children's attention and at the same time, children can enjoy themselves during the class. In terms of the use of textbooks, most of the teachers worried that the dependence on a textbook increases boredom of class.

4. Perceptions of Teaching and Learning Environment

1) Teaching Culture

Language and culture is inextricably intertwined. Accordingly, it is unavoidable to teach Western culture in English kindergarten. Both native-speaking teachers and Korean teachers responded that teaching Western culture to the students enriched the students' knowledge. Subsequently, as to the interview question concerning the confusion of students' identity, all mothers did not worry about it:

I draw comparisons occasionally between cultures simply to broaden the children's perspective. I would not think there would be any negative influence on their Korean identity, because I have no intention grading cultures. Also, there is a lot of Korean content in the curriculum. (Joanne, September 20, 2006)

Everyone has their own culture. I don't teach Western culture intentionally. Of course, children may get some cultural influence from me because I'm a foreigner. I think children should be taught to have wide thinking. (Mark, September 29, 2006)

Since there is much Korean content in the curriculum, Joanne replied that teaching Western culture cannot negatively influence children's Korean identity. It implies that Korean culture in the curriculum helps the students not to suffer from a confusion of identity. Mark focused on importance of each culture. Each country has its own culture that is respected. Also, Boram's mother expressed the same opinion about language influence on students' identity in the excerpt below:

My daughter seems to not suffer from a confusion of identity. She is proud of Korea as her mother country. Attending English kindergarten doesn't mean that children should be taught only Western culture. Also, my daughter is too young to think about her identity. On the contrary, it is good for her to contact with foreign culture everyday even though she can't go there. (Boram's mother, October 1, 2006)

Boram's mother proves that teaching Western culture does not create a confusion of children's identity. Five to seven-year-old children are relatively young to question their Korean identity. Therefore, it cannot be justified that attending the English kindergarten prevents children from keeping Korean identity.

2) The Role of Parents

Throughout the whole process of data analysis, the researcher could keenly realize the importance of the parents' role. Parents play an important role in

children's education. In order to insure children's success in English education, it is necessary for parents to constantly support their children. The parents' role at home is one of the most important factors affecting the children's educational success. Parents need to have their children be exposed to English, for example, by providing audio-visual materials or reading English books to them. Concerning the parents' role in successful English education, the teachers advised the parents to assist children's English learning:

Children's education can't be achieved by only teachers. It is decided by teachers, parents, and children themselves. In order to succeed in second language acquisition, children must be surrounded by it as much as possible. So, parents should make such an environment for their children by reading English books or listening English song at home. (Judy, September 25, 2006)

Some parents seem to have a wrong perception on Western culture. They consider it superior to Korea. So, such a mistaken idea is likely to be easily absorbed in children's mind and may bring confusion of identity. (Soomin, September 18, 2006)

Providing natural exposure to English is effective for children's natural English acquisition. However, some parents' misconceptions of the western culture may influence children's identity. Their biased view that grades cultures may generate their children's confusion of identity.

V. DISCUSSION

As the interest in English education increases, the implementation of early English education has spread all over the country. The results of this study indicate that early English education is necessary for Korean children because English education in elementary school has already started, and Korean children should be prepared to meet the challenges of globalization. Jeong-Ryeol Kim (2006) supports early English education emphasizing that the importance of English becomes grater as days go by. Korean children need to learn English as

early as possible because language cannot be acquired in a short period and English education became an unavoidable reality. Another reason why early English education should be implemented is that children have more advantages in English learning than adults. Through the data analysis of this study, it is proved that children's English learning is more effective than adults due to their flexible brains, ability to acquire English pronunciation, and cognitive factors. The rationale of critical period supports the result of the present study. According to Sung-Hui Cheong and Dong Hoon Lee (2003), children's language acquisition is more effective than adults' because their brains are more efficient in processing language due to plasticity, and they have a low affective filter which makes their anxiety in language learning low.

In terms of interference to first language acquisition, the present study shows that children learning English in immersion English program don't have much problem in Korean acquisition. Also, their Korean ability is not behind other children who attend usual kindergartens because, no matter how much the children learn English, their environment belongs to EFL (English as a Foreign Language) context where they are exposed to more Korean than English. Early English education does not directly disturb children's Korean language acquisition or changes their Korean identity. However, it needs to be more discussed that parents spend more money in children's Korean education.

Concerning the young learners' identity in language learning, Hyunoo Lee (2006) reports that early English education makes children lose their Korean identity because children with early English education imitate the English teachers and acculturate themselves to the Western culture. However, the result of the present study indicates that early English education does not affect the loss of children's Korean identity. In addition, early English education or attending English kindergarten does not imply that native-speaking teachers force their students to study Western culture. Rather, native-speaking teachers enrich the students' world view by introducing their culture. Also, Korean content in curriculum makes children have a desirable perspective on Korean culture.

Contact with Western culture by native-speaking teachers and English as a part of a culture allows the children to form their own world view. Hae-sook Kwon. (2005) reports that the advantage of English kindergarten is to provide children

with a natural and rich environment in language acquisition. Even though children do not go abroad, they can acquire English successfully under the circumstances which are reliable and authentic. Unlike *Hag-Seb-Ji* or small classes in usual kindergartens, English kindergarten has its own systematic and well-fixed curriculums, and it facilitates the children's English learning to be improved. The English kindergarten implements the content-based instruction that requires an authentic and real situation. Students can learn not only English but also other subjects through content-based instruction. Huang (2003) also found that, through content-based teaching, learners were motivated and were communicate with visuals and other supporting materials. Through meaningful and purposeful contents that corresponds to the children's level and interests, children learn a variety of subjects as well as English. Subsequently, the educational effect multiplies. As this study proves, social studies or science class which captures the children's interests and curiosity leads the children to have a greater knowledge of the subjects while being exposed to a natural English environment.

VI. CONCLUSION

This study explored teachers' and parents' perceptions on early English education and the current situation of English kindergarten in Korea. As a result, it is revealed that the earlier the English education starts, the better its effect improves. As to the current situation of English kindergarten, the result of the present study shows that both native-speaking teachers and Korean teachers should cooperate for successful English education. Also content-based instruction is appropriate for students' English improvement, and teaching Western culture does not disturb the children's national identity, but enriches their knowledge.

In the age of globalization, early English education is necessary for young children. In order to accomplish successful immersion language program, the roles of teachers, parents, and the program itself should be harmonized well (Coltrane, 2003). Both native-speaking teachers and Korean teachers need to recognize their advantages and disadvantages which are related to English proficiency and possession of Korean culture. Such self-recognition will lead them to collaborate.

In addition, English kindergarten should institute teacher training programs so as to improve its curriculum and teacher development.

The last implication for the teachers is connected with teaching culture in the classroom. As stated before, the teachers' role in teaching culture is very important as well as the parents' role. Korean content in a curriculum can help the teachers guide students properly in teaching culture. With the proper guide that informs the children of cultural knowledge, the parents should support their children's English learning. They need to observe the children's learning and provide natural home environment for learning English with the children. As Nissani (1990) points out, "the home and school should ideally work effectively together and support one another in the job of nurturing and education young children (p. 6)."

This study has limitations in terms of the types of participants. For the purpose of obtaining more objective results, this study required three types of participants such as native-speaking teachers, Korean English teachers, and the parents of children. However, this study did not have interviews with the children who are centered in it, because the researcher concluded that the children were unskilled in expressing their own opinions. As their parents participated in this study instead of them, it cannot assure that their opinions were the same as their children's. However, the results of this study may serve as a basis for further studies on early English education and English kindergarten or immersion English programs to better teach English to young Korean learners as well as to assist English teachers and parents.

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APPENDIX A

Interview Questions for Teachers

1. Early English Education

- 1-1. How do you think about early English education?
- 1-2. Do you think that early English education is effective for studying English?
(If yes, explain the reason. If no, explain the reason.)
- 1-3. When do you think is the best age for English education?, Why do you think so?
(Please explain the reason.)
- 1-4. How do you think about the influence of early English education on children's Korean acquisition? (A question for Korean English teachers)

2. About Teachers

- 2-1. What is the most needed quality for English kindergarten teachers?
- 2-2. What is the most difficult thing as an English kindergarten teachers?
- 2-3. Have you ever felt any difficulties in classroom interactions between you and your students? If yes, how do you solve those problems?
- 2-4. Do you receive a teacher training on a regular basis?
If yes, where did do you receive teacher training?
If no, would you like to receive the teacher training in the near future?
- 2-5. Who do you think are more effective teachers for early English education, Korean teachers or native teachers? Why do you think so?, explain the reason.
- 2-6. What do you think are your merits and demerits as a foreign English teacher?
- 2-7. What do you think are the merits and demerits of Korean English teachers?

3. About Teaching Method

- 3-1. What is the children's' most favorite teaching method?
- 3-2. What is the most effective teaching method for children's English development in your class?
- 3-3. What kind of materials do you use in the class?
- 3-4. What is the most effective material in your class?
- 3-5. What do you think are the required equipments and facilities for English kindergarten?
- 3-6. Do you think teachers and students should speak only English in the English kindergarten? Why do you think so?
- 3-7. Do you teach Western culture during the class? If yes, how do you teach the

Western culture to your students?, how does it influence on Korean children's identity?

APPENDIX B

Interview Questions for Parents

1. 자녀를 영어유치원에 보내는 학부모들의 초기 영어교육에 대한 인식
 - 1-1. 자녀를 영어유치원에 보내는 이유는 무엇입니까?
 - 1-2. 어머니는 자녀가 다니고 있는 영어유치원에 만족하십니까?, 만족하신다면 어떤 이유에서인지, 만족하지 않으신다면 그 이유를 설명해 주세요.
 - 1-3. 자녀의 영어에 대한 흥미도는 어떻습니까?
 - 1-4. 영어유치원에 다님으로써, 자녀의 영어실력이 많이 향상된다고 생각하십니까?
 - 1-5. 영어교육의 최적연령은 언제라고 생각하십니까?, 왜 그렇다고 생각하십니까?
 - 1-6. 초기영어교육이 자녀의 한국어 습득에 어떤 영향을 끼친다고 생각하십니까?
 - 1-7. 자녀의 한국어 실력이 타 유치원을 다니는 아동들과 비교했을 때 어떻다고 느끼십니까?
 - 1-8. 자녀의 한국어 교육은 어떠한 형태로 이루어지고 있습니까?

2. 자녀를 영어유치원에 보내는 학부모들의 교사에 대한 인식
 - 2-1. 한국인 선생님과 원어민 선생님 중 영어교육에 누가 더 효율적이라고 생각하십니까?
 - 2-2. 한국인 선생님이 아이에게 영어를 가르칠 때 가질 수 있는 장점과 단점은 무엇이라고 생각하십니까?
 - 2-3. 외국인 선생님이 아이에게 영어를 가르칠 때 가질 수 있는 장점과 단점은 무엇이라고 생각하십니까?
 - 2-4. 영어유치원 선생님이므로써 갖추어야 할 자질에는 어떤 것들이 필요하다고 보십니까?

3. 영어유치원 교과과정에 대한 학부모의 인식
 - 3-1. 유치원 교과과정 중 자녀가 가장 좋아하는 부분은 무엇입니까? 왜 그렇다고 생각하십니까?
 - 3-2. 유치원 교과 과정 중에서 어머니 입장에서 자녀의 영어 학습에 가장 효율적이라고 생각하시는 부분은 무엇입니까?
 - 3-3. 유치원 교과과정 중 어머니께서 불만족스럽거나 바라는 점은 무엇입니까? 이유를 설명해 주세요.
 - 3-4. 유치원에서 사용되고 있는 영어 교재들이 자녀의 영어 수준에 맞다고 생각하십니까?

3-5. 영어유치원을 다니는 것이 한국인으로서의 아이의 정체성에 어떠한 영향을 끼친다고 생각하십니까?

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