

READING STORIES TO EFL CHILDREN: THE STRATEGIES FOR SUPPORTING ENGLISH
LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

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READING STORIES TO EFL CHILDREN: THE STRATEGIES FOR SUPPORTING ENGLISH
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Abstract

READING STORIES TO EFL CHILDREN: THE STRATEGIES FOR SUPPORTING ENGLISH LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

Qiqi Zhou

Under the Supervision of Dr. Hollingsworth

This literature-based review explored the impact of reading English storybooks to Chinese children as a method for encouraging English language acquisition. Two common approaches to English storybooks reading, dialogic and shared reading were examined. The review of the literature indicated that parent-child reading in English at home played an important role on Chinese children's English language acquisition and vocabulary, and it also affected children's attitude and interest towards reading. This review of the literature focuses on following aspects:

- 1) early childhood English education
- 2) home literacy environment studies in China
- 3) effective practices in the classroom
- 4) parent-child reading in China: Impact on children's language development, vocabulary, attitude and interest after reading storybooks

This paper will provide useful information to parents who are interested in supporting their child's English language development.

Keywords: English storybooks, early childhood English education, shared reading, dialogic reading, parent-child reading. English as a foreign language, English language and literacy skills.

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Chapter I Introduction

Reading storybooks to young Children can enhance their first language (Arnold, Longigan, Whitehurst & Epstein, 1994; Chow & Mc-Bride-Chang, 2003) and second language development (Chow, McBride-Chang & Cheung, 2010). Unfortunately, this strategy is new to Chinese parents. With increased attention to English early childhood education in China, many Chinese parents let their children learn English at an early age (Yu & Ruan, 2010). However, as equal as learning English at various school settings, reading storybooks in English by parents at home received little attention compared to foreign studies. For example, in United States and Canada, teaching children to read and write by engaging them in storybooks in home or school had been well studied. These findings indicated that implementing different reading strategies, such as dialogic reading (Whitehurst, 1992), shared reading (Holdaway, 1979, 1982) can positively enhance children's first language and literacy skills. While most of parents in China were only aware to the impact of the English early childhood education at school on children's English language development. Due to limited research investigating the relationship between reading English storybooks to Chinese children and their English as a foreign language acquisition exists. This paper aims to explore (a) the impact of English storybook reading on Chinese preschoolers' English acquisition; (b) two common approaches to English storybook reading, dialogic and shared reading; and (c) practical suggestions for parents who are interested in using storybook reading as an EFL strategy.

Statement of the Problem

Early English acquisition greatly influences children's academic achievement in elementary school. Although it is not a mandatory subject during the preschool years, Chinese parents show an interest in their children's English learning (Butler, 2013). They recognize the

benefit for children to learn English at a young age to prepare for elementary school and future academic success (Shimpi et al. 2015).

However, Early English education was not always reliable. According to Hu & Adamson (2012), “early childhood English education has largely remained an unregulated area. No curriculum standards have been developed by either the Ministry of Education at the central government level or education bureaus at the local government level” (p.88). Due to little empirical evidence, it is unknown how early childhood English education may affect Chinese young children’s English language acquisition. Parents are cautioned when considering early English programs instead of educating children themselves at home. Ding & Meng (2015) claimed that parents cannot simply assume that sending children to early childhood school is equal to family education at home. This suggestion was consistent with the report by Xu (2015) on the home education during the early childhood years. Parents should recognize the importance of a home literacy environment and how parent-child reading can influence children’s language development.

Definition of Terms

Additive bilingualism:

“additive bilingualism, where members of a dominant group learn the language of a subordinate group without threat to their L1 competence or to their ethnic identity” (Saville-Troike, 2006, p. 134).

Linguistic interdependence hypothesis:

“The Linguistic Interdependence Hypothesis as developed by Cummins (1978) argues that certain first language (L1) knowledge can be positively transferred during the process of second language (L2) acquisition. The L1 linguistic knowledge and skills that a child possesses can be extremely instrumental to the development of corresponding abilities in the L2.” (Vrooman, 2000, p. 5).

Emergent literacy:

“emergent literacy is a fairly new term used to conceptualized early reading and writing development” (Zygouris-coe, 2001, p. 6). Phonological awareness as one of important elements of emergent literacy plays important role in developing children’s early word reading skills. Yopp &Yopp (2000) have indicated that sharing text with young children promoted their emergent literacy skills which included “an alphabet knowledge, sound-symbol correspondences, concepts about print and phonological awareness” (p. 417).

Home literacy environment:

home literacy environment is defined as participation in literacy activities in the home, and includes both exposure to and frequency of parental activities such as joint book reading, modeling of independent reading and support of literacy-related activities, providing books, and going to the library (Griffin & Morrison, 1997). Home literacy environment has a close relationship with preschooler’s language ability. It also associated with collection of books at home, the frequency of library visits (Bracken & Fischel, 2008).

Critical period hypothesis:

the critical period hypothesis refers to an optimal period for a language acquisition which was first proposed by Penfield & Roberts (1959), and the concept was developed by Lenneberg (1967) who indicated that “automatic acquisition from mere exposure to a given language seems to disappear [after puberty], and foreign languages have to be taught and learned through a conscious and labored effort. Foreign accents cannot be overcome easily after puberty” (p. 176). Birdsong (1999) defines the CPH as follows: “the CPH states that there is a limited developmental period during which it is possible to acquire a language be it L1 or L2, to normal, nativelike levels. Once this window of opportunity is passed, however, the ability to learn language declines” (p. 1).

Storybook reading:

adults use read aloud method to teach children to read and write with an appropriate text. “The story-book reading paradigm adopts the scaffolding analogy to characterized the way in which literate adults enable a child to participate in book reading and thereby learn from it (Bruner, 1975)” (Bus, 1994, p.10).

Shared reading:

“The term shared reading, first used by Holdaway (1979), described a model for teaching children beginning literacy skills, such as learning one-to-one tracking of text and letter-sound relationships while reading books with enlarged text.” (Schickedanz & McGee, 2010, p.323). Many scholars extended this term in a broader view to describe different read aloud approaches with books to facilitate children’s vocabulary development and other emergent literacy (Pillinger & Wood, 2014; Sénéchal, 1997; Chow & McBride-Chang, 2003).

Dialogic reading:

dialogic reading is a specific parent–child reading technique that emphasizes scaffolded parent–child interactions (Whitehurst et al., 1988). This instruction encourages children to actively engage in reading through different activities, such as asking questions, supporting children to switch the role as a passive listener to active storyteller (Chow et.al, 2010), providing assistance and feedback to facilitate child’s oral language expressions (Blomm-Hoffman et al. 2006). As an adult, he/she should slightly revise reading strategy according to child’s language ability (Pillinger & Wood, 2014) during storybook reading. With this technique, children are scaffolded to speak more and use more sophisticated language than they normally do, and this contributes to more rapid growth of language skills, according to the principle of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978).

Receptive and expressive vocabulary:

receptive vocabulary refers to the vocabulary that people can understand in both oral and written language; while expressive word which means the word that a person can express or produce in his/her speaking or writing. People usually have larger receptive vocabulary than expressive vocabulary (Unruh & McKellar, 2017).

The zone of proximal development (ZPD):

ZPD can be defined as “the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance; or in collaboration with more capable peers” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). Vygotsky stated that a child follows an adult's example and gradually develops the ability to do certain tasks without help (Vygotsky, 1978).

Second Language Acquisition (SLA):

“Second Language Acquisition refers to the learning of a nonnative language after the learning of the native language. The second language is commonly referred to as the L2. As with the phrase “second language”, L2 can refer to any language learned after learning the L1, regardless of whether it is the second, third, fourth, or fifth language.” (Gass & Selinker, 2008, p. 7).

Foreign language acquisition:

“Foreign language learning is generally differentiated from second language acquisition in that the former refers to the learning of a nonnative language in the environment of one’s native language (e.g., French speakers learning English in France or Spanish speakers learning French in Spain, Argentina, or Mexico” (Gass & Selinker, 2008, p. 7).

Purpose of the Study

Reading books with children is a proven method to enhance children’s first language development in vocabulary, letter knowledge, print awareness and word writing during early years

according to studies conducted in English speaking countries (Pillinger & Wood, 2014; Sim, Berthelsen, Walker, Nicholson, & Fielding-Barnsley, 2014). Scholars have raised concerns about how storybook reading intervention affect EFL children's language development. The findings indicated that reading English storybooks as a method can promote their second vocabulary acquisition, literacy skills in English (Chow et.al, 2010), as well as their attitude and interest towards reading (Kotaman, 2008). Therefore, this study aims to explore whether reading storybooks in English as a method can support Chinese children's English language acquisition in the EFL context. It will explore following aspects: (a) the impact of English storybook reading on Chinese preschoolers' English acquisition; (b) two common approaches to English storybook reading, dialogic and shared reading; and (c) practical suggestions for parents who are interested in using storybook reading as an EFL strategy.

Significance of the Study

Parents are children's first teacher. Children spend most of their time at home before they enroll in formal education. The children's family reading behaviors and home literacy environment play very important role and have a strong impact on their language and literacy learning (Bracken & Fischel, 2008). This literature-based research provides useful information for parents who are eager to have their children learn a foreign language at an early age.

Delimitation of the Study

This study is non-empirical research; the findings are based on existing literature reviews instead of doing a primary research on Chinese children. The result may not be applicable to all Chinese children with their parents who have little English knowledge.

Methodology

The present study focuses on the relationship between storybook reading in English as

foreign language and EFL children's second language acquisition. It seeks to find out whether reading English storybooks will enhance Chinese preschooler's English language acquisition.

The overarching research question is "how does storybook reading by parents promote English language acquisition in Chinese preschoolers?" This literature-based study will explore the following aspects:

1. two common approaches to English storybook reading, dialogic and shared reading
2. practical suggestions for parents who are interested in using storybook reading as an EFL strategy.

The literature-based data collection and analyses are based on following databases: Academic Search Complete, Education Research Complete, Education Resource Information Center (ERIC), JSTOR, Taylor & Francis Online and CNKI. The following keywords will be used to search relevant articles online: storybook reading, dialogical reading, shared reading, parent-child interaction, children, preschooler, early childhood English, vocabulary, attitude and interest towards reading. The time period of chosen research is identified from 1989 to 2017.

Chapter II Review of Literature

Parent-child reading as a home literacy activity was first introduced in China in the 1990s (Zhang, 2009) and has gained attention among Chinese scholars and parents during the last few decades. With the development of a global economy and emphasis on cultural exchange, China is more open to outside influence. The increased support for foreign ideas and values have shifted the policy-makers and Chinese people's traditional view towards education.

In 2001, The Ministry of Education of China (MOE) announced Kindergarten Education Guidelines which put early childhood reading as a target into the language teaching system for the first time. The following guidelines were provided: (a) developing children's interest in simple marks and prints that are commonly seen in life; (b) cultivating children's interest towards books; (c) reading and writing by drawing, painting and other activities; (d) teaching emergent literacy (e) training the children to love reading and listening to the storybooks (Zhang, 2009). The importance of early childhood reading in preschool was clearly recognized by Chinese government's top-down reform and indirectly affected parents' view towards early exposure to books. Moreover, Chinese parents' interest towards early reading experiences with children have also generated by an increasingly large book market for children. According to Cui (2015), the market for children's books was six times larger in 2015 than it was in 2009.

Despite the interest in English early childhood programs and the mass quantity of children's book available in English, parents in China are not reading to their child in home. For example, the majority of Chinese researchers emphasize group activities and teaching early reading in kindergarten (Zhang, 2009). Less attention has been given to home reading practice and limited research is available for Chinese parents who are interested in learning and using reading strategies with their children (Ji, 2003; Zhang, 2009).

Many parents are not engaging in reading activities with their children. Ma & Lu (2015) examined parent-child book sharing experiences at home and found that only 10% of parents read Chinese books to their children every day. Of these, 28 % parents read only one or two times a week. The finding also indicated that parents are not acting on research that suggests that reading to children promotes their language and literacy development and cultivates their reading habits and attitudes (Ma & Lu, 2015).

Similarly, parents' interest in reading and reading habits affect children's attitude and interest in reading, Zhang (2008) indicated that children are more likely to love reading when their parents model a love for reading and choose to read at home. In contrast, children may not be interested in reading if they do not have an adult reading role model to follow. A recent report from China Daily (2015) indicated that the average Chinese adult read 4.56 books in 2014. This statistic is very low compared to adults in other countries: (a) French adults averaged 12; (b) adults in South Korea averaged 11; (c) Japanese and American adults read 7. Forty percent of Chinese people read less than one book other than text books per year. The finding explains why parent-child reading was not popular among Chinese families compared to other foreign countries. If parents are not readers themselves, it is unlikely that they will read with their children.

Parent-child reading in China is relatively new and hasn't been addressed by Chinese mainland scholars. For example, some of existing literature focuses on reporting and analyzing the parent-child reading phenomenon in mainland China and addressing parents' attitudes and beliefs toward reading as well as other parental factors (Ji, 2003; Zhang, 2015). Other studies introduce foreign reading strategies such as shared reading and dialogic reading (Hu, 2008; Zhang, 2009). More research is needed to explore parental book reading in a second language with children on first or second language and literacy development. This research seeks to address the importance

of parent-child interactions in book sharing as a tool for enhancing children's second language learning in English as a foreign language. The study will particularly explore the impact of parents reading English books to children as a means to support acquisition of English vocabulary, as well as building children's interest in reading books in English.

Early Childhood English Education in China

Early childhood education (ECE) in China refers to preschool education which involves children from birth to age six (Li, Yang & Chen, 2016). It is neither compulsory nor free; parents pay for ECE. Teaching English to young children has received a lot of attention in Chinese early childhood education since new English Curriculum Standards for Compulsory Education (2011) has been introduced and directed a reform of English education in China. This document strongly emphasized developing students' English communication skills from an early age. In response, more and more private English preschools have emerged with aims to provide language-rich environments in order to build children's communicative competence in English from an early age (Yu & Ruan, 2010; Dongbo Zhang, 2012).

Many children are participating in ECE programs and some challenges are emerging such as conflicting values and high costs. The statistics show that more than 70% of young Chinese children enrolled in early childhood English programs in 2014 (Industry Information Network, 2015). Many of these English programs imparted new ideas and values from foreign countries, which shifted the traditional view towards education for both schools and parents. For example, some curriculum emphasized individualism, independence, and cooperation, values that are not typically associated with the Confucian tradition (Sidel, 1982, Shimpi et.al, 2015; Pang & Rickey, 2007). Another challenge is that ECE programs are growing increasingly more elaborate and expensive. For example, some enrichment programs offer one-on-one tutoring or overseas

camping experiences at a great cost to the parents (Butler, 2013). The ECE programs are challenging Chinese family values and are not accessible to all families due to high costs.

Despite reform efforts, the fulfillment of children's learning outcomes hasn't successfully observed. Zhu (2010) indicated that traditional Confucianism and communist cultural influence in education have caused a conflict with those shared through teacher approaches that promote Western philosophies. In typical Chinese fashion, students are trained to sit quietly and learn knowledge without asking questions unless prompted by the teacher. In contrast to that, Western education encourages students to actively participate in class activities. This cultural difference causes children to be confused as to how to meet behavioral expectations in the classroom.

It is important to emphasize that family education also plays the crucial role in children's early education. Because family education is the earliest for education that children receive, parents are the first teacher and role model for children in terms of language and behavior. Their influence has an essential impact on children's development (Zhang 2015; Yan, 2015). Wang (2011) advocated for a strong school and home partnership and emphasized that a solid English learning environment at home could provide children with a foundation for future English learning at school. Wang (2011) also suggested parents could support children's English learning at home by reviewing what they have learned at school by reading English text books with children, role playing in English, and watching English movies. Therefore, it is necessary for Chinese families to understand that early experiences with English at school and home are equally important. By introducing children to English at home in a quality learning environment, parents are able to prepare them for early English education at school and generate their interest and motivation to learn English.

Home literacy studies in China

Home literacy environment plays a crucial role in development children's language and literacy skills. Many studies indicated that the frequency of reading books with children has a positive impact on children's language and literacy development (Bracken & Fischel, 2008; Griffin & Morrison, 1997). Further, research supports exposing children to literacy-related materials in order to enhance children's vocabulary (Sénéchal, LeFevre, Hudson & Lawson, 1996; Hargrave & Sénéchal, 2000). Other parental factors such as families' socio-economic status, parent's belief and expectation were also linked with children's language achievement (Yeung & King, 2016; Butler, 2013).

Yeung & King (2016) examined the influence of home literacy environment (HLE) on Chinese Hong Kong kindergartens' English as second language development. They examined three home literacy practices which include shared reading, exposure to English materials, and home teaching. Home teaching in this study includes instruction on homework and teaching children to read and write words. The results showed that the frequency of shared reading was linked to children's development of several literacy skills. For example, frequency of shared reading played the important role in promoting both receptive and expressive vocabulary development. Receptive vocabulary refers to the vocabulary that people can understand in both oral and written language; while expressive word which means the word that a person can express or produce in his/her speaking or writing. People usually have larger receptive vocabulary than expressive vocabulary (Unruh & McKellar, 2017). Frequency of shared reading also positively influenced children's literacy-related skills including phonological awareness at the syllable level. For example, children were expected to complete the last syllable of a two-syllable word such as picture when the adult examiner pronounced only first syllable – "pic" during the test. In addition, frequency of shared reading has a significant effect on improving children's skills on English word

reading. Similarly, the finding showed that the exposure to literacy-related materials such as the number of books or educational CD-ROMs available at home was also found to be positively associated with Hong Kong Chinese kindergarteners' English vocabulary development. Home teaching was only found to contribute to letter naming skills excluded other literacy-related outcomes (Yeung & King, 2016). The findings show parent-child shared reading at home can provide a wholistic approach in improving children's English language and literacy skills.

Butler (2013) investigated the relationship between families' socio-economic status and early English education in mainland China. The study found that socioeconomic status made a significant contribution in children's learning achievement in English. Parents with high incomes were able to provide more support for their children by hiring a private tutor to teach children in a one-on-one setting or buying English books for the home (Butler, 2013). Butler also found that parents' beliefs and expectations about their children's success for learning English strongly predicted children's achievement in the higher grades. For example, children from high socio-economic status families typically demonstrate strong academic performance as a result of the high expectations of their parents (Butler, 2013).

The research explains that various forms of home literacy interactions such as shared reading, home teaching, as well as parent's income, belief and expectations are all positively associated with Chinese children's English as a foreign language learning (Butler, 2013; Yeung & King, 2016). However, reading English books with children showed better influence on developing more comprehensive English language skills than other home literacy practices. Huang (2004) indicated that her daughter loved reading English storybooks with her mum and always chose the one with colorful and beautiful pictures. She enjoyed a variety of topics ranging from old classical stories such as little red riding hood to the history and culture related storybooks, the more she

read, the more she loved to read (Huang, 2004).

In short, sharing English books with children is an important factor of building a good home literacy environment, because it can positively effect on children's language and interest in reading. English storybook itself can also provide different kinds of contexts and illustrations for Chinese children to learn English according their interest and taste. Therefore, Chinese parents can consider reading interesting and appealing English stories with children and motive them love to learn English by reading.

Effective reading practices in the classroom

Using shared book reading to teach children read and write was popular in United States and New Zealand at school. For example, Justice & Kaderavek (2012) stressed that the shared reading experience can support children to learn a variety of skills such as understanding the sounds of oral and written language, letter knowledge, vocabulary, and the relationship between oral language and written words (Swindal, 1993). Shared reading was original from New Zealand by Holdaway (1979) based on a parent-child bedtime story routine. Holdaway (1982) indicated that shared reading was an applicable strategy that can be used with a group of students in the classroom. It requires the teacher to use enlarged texts to teach children to read and write by engaging them in different kinds of class activities such as role-play, rhymes, art-related activities, and class discussion. The teacher provided demonstrations of these skills and taught children vocabulary and other language skills by asking them to predict the stories and engaging them in their favorite text repeatedly (Nicoll-Hatton, 1992). Children were also given ample opportunities to read alone and encouraged to become an independent reader (Park, 1982). It was important for teachers to create a warm, secure, enjoyable learning environment by supporting children's' learning in a friendly and sincerely way (Holdaway, 1982).

Another reading strategy is called dialogic reading, which is also frequently used among English-speaking children in school settings. Dialogic reading was first proposed by Whitehurst and his colleagues in 1989. The major differences between shared reading and dialogic reading is dialogic reading focuses more on language interaction between an adult and a child or children. It aims to use picture books to evoke child's speech by asking open-ended and Wh-questions (e.g. what, who, when, where, how and which), and adults are required to examine and provide feedback according to child's response timely by giving praise and additional information to maintain child's interest (Valdez-Menchaca & Whitehurst, 1992; Aron, Lonigan, Whitehurst & Epstein, 1994). The main focus of dialogic reading was to encourage children become a storyteller while the adult shifts roles to become a listener (Valdez-Menchaca & Whitehurst, 1992). A detailed example of how a teacher reads a book dialogically with students is given below (Flynn, 2011, p. 10):

Table 1. Dialogic reading Guideline

Dialogic Reading Guideline			
	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
1	Ask "wh" type questions. "What is this?" "What do you call that?"	Ask questions related to the story plot. "What did he do next?" "Why was he sad?" "Where are they?"	Ask questions related to the story plot. "What did he do next?" "Why was he sad?" "Where are they?"
2	Follow answers with questions. "What color is it? What is it used for?"	Follow answers with expansions. Add 1 or 2 words to student's answer	Start asking distancing questions that relate to the student's personal experiences and remote events. "Did you ever see one?"

			"Have you ever been to a _____?"
3	Have students repeat new words	Have students repeat expansions.	Help students as needed.
4	Help students as needed.	Help students as needed.	Praise and encourage students.
5	Talk about what interests your students	Let students choose topics to talk about.	Have fun!!
6	Praise and encourage Students	Praise and encourage students	
7	Have fun!!	Have fun!!	

These two strategies have been examined thoroughly and found to influence children's language and literacy skills, Sheu (2008) adopted the method of using English books to teach Taiwan primary school children English as a foreign language at school. The finding showed that English story books provided a rich and meaningful context for children to learn vocabulary, speaking, and other language skills. An interesting story motivated children to learn English in order to understand the plot. The illustrations supported the children's understanding of the story and helped children to use their own imagination to interpret the picture. This led to rich discussions in the classroom. English storybooks are a key resource for teaching children English because the story and illustrations provide a rich context for related language and learning activities. Children naturally improve their English in an interactive environment by asking questions, playing games, role playing and etc.

Reading storybooks aloud with children in classroom is a method that can benefit children's first language acquisition. Similarly, reading English storybooks in the context of English as a foreign language classroom also promoted children's second language development (Sheu, 2008).

So, Chinese parents who are interested in supporting their children English learning at home could learn from above the information and apply these strategies during parent-child storybooks reading in home.

Impact of storybook reading on children's language development and vocabulary

Reading books to children makes an important a contribution to their early language development. Large-scale studies in United States and Canada have examined the effect of different styles of reading on monolingual English speaking children's language development (Whitehurst, 1988; Valdez-Manchaca & Whitehurst, 1992; Arnold, Lonigan, Whitehurst, & Epstein, 1994). Some studies have focused particularly on the effect of the parent-child interaction and frequency of reading on children's vocabulary acquisition during shared reading events (Sénéchal & Cornell, 1993; Sénéchal, Thomas, & Monker, 1995).

Sénéchal & Cornell (1993) investigated the influence of four types of parent-child storybook reading on 4 and 5-year-old children's vocabulary acquisition. They encouraged parents to ask "Wh-questions" (e.g. who, what, where, why) to encourage children's response for example, parents ask children, "Who is Zach? Where are Ann's brushes?" (pp. 373-374). This was based on Whitehurst's dialogic reading model (1988). Parents were also trained to replace target words from the text with a synonym. For example, "Zoe the cat is reposing. Zoe the cat is resting" (p. 366). In the third condition, adults stated the target words and children repeated. Under the last condition, parents were only required to read the text without engaging children in reading. The findings showed that children's vocabulary increased in every condition after a single reading of a book, particularly for the 5-year-old children, who made larger receptive vocabulary gains compared to the 4-year-old group. Additionally, children who answered the questions during the reading better performed on word comprehension tasks than children who passively listened to the story.

Children who actively participated in labeling objects in the story uttered more words than children who simply listened to the story (Sénéchal & Cornell, 1993). This finding was consistent with findings from Sénéchal et al. (1995); children that actively responded to questions demonstrated greater levels of word comprehension and word production.

Reading stories to children can not only enhance children's first language and literacy development among monolingual English speaking children, but also improve Hong Kong children's L1 as Cantonese and L2 as English in China. For example, Chow & McBride-Chang (2003) investigated whether storybook reading can benefit Hong Kong preschooler's Chinese language and literacy development. The study design was based on Whitehurst and his colleagues experiment (1994, 1998) and aimed to compare the effect of dialogical reading and typical reading on Hong Kong preschooler's Chinese language and literacy skills which including word reading, receptive and expressive vocabulary and etc. The result has supported the hypothesis that storybook reading can also work for Hong Kong Chinese children within 8-week intervention. The finding showed that dialogic reading positively accelerated Chinese Hong Kong children's Chinese literacy growth compared with typical reading and control groups; while children's receptive vocabulary gains were noted in both dialogic reading and typical reading conditions except control group. The results confirm that parent -child reading as a method can positively support Chinese Hong Kong children's L1 acquisition in both dialogically or non-dialogically conditions.

In further study on whether storybook reading in English as a foreign language would affect Hong Kong Chinese kindergarteners' English language and literacy development, Chow et.al (2010) examined the relationship between reading storybook in English and Hong Kong Chinese kindergarteners' English language and literacy development. The linguistic transfer from Chinese

to English was also examined in the study. Children were assigned into three groups which including dialogic reading group, typical group and control group. Twelve English storybooks were provided to dialogic reading and typical reading groups, while no books were given to control group. Parents were required to read books in English twice a week about 20 mins each time in dialogic and regular reading groups. The result showed that parent-child reading in English at home promoted children's English as a second language acquisition in the foreign context. The significant evidence was found that children's English word reading was increased in both dialogic reading and typical reading condition which implied that parent-child interaction was specifically tied to children's ability to read English word, while dialogic reading intervention positively influenced children's English phonological awareness. However, the study failed to find a positive correlation between the impact of parent-child reading in English and children's English receptive vocabulary growth among Hong Kong children. In short, parent-child reading in English at home can benefit EFL children's English language acquisition in China.

The attitude and interest after book reading

Parent-child reading can also influence children's attitude and interest toward reading, Sénéchal et al. (1996) found out that the frequency of reading with children was not only contributed to vocabulary development but also enhanced children's interest and attitude toward reading. The research indicated that children who were read more frequently tended to be more interested in reading, and the children who were interested in reading spent more time reading on their own and initiated more reading from parents, and eventually have been read more to (Sénéchal et al., 1996). Pillinger & Wood (2014) also found that reading books dialogically can improve children's enjoyment of reading and also changed parents' attitude towards reading. These findings indicate that parent-child book reading can influence both children and parents attitude

towards reading which was considered as a two-way influence. Chow & McBride-Chang (2003) found that reading dialogically with Chinese Hong Kong children had a positive impact on their attitude and interest towards reading. Chow et. al (2010) found that parents who participated in the research of reading English storybooks to Hong Kong children also expressed their preference for interacting dialogically with their children during the reading.

Zhang (2009) indicated that early parent-child reading experience is a beneficial educational activity, which can enhance children's reading interest and also improve parent-child relationship. Bergin (2001) indicated that a safe attachment between parents and children could help children feel less frustrated and enable them to participate in language related tasks more willingly during shared reading. The research also pointed out that children's affection towards parents was also closely related to children's attitude towards reading. For example, children may encounter less frustration, show more positive attitude, and be more engaged in reading when they interact with their parents (Bergin, 2001). Conversely, parents' negative attitude towards children and reading may cause children to feel frustrated and refuse to read. Additionally, cultural differences may be considered when parents read English books to children; Chinese children are taught to listen passively without questions as a way to respect the adult. It is important to note that parent-child reading can impact children's attitude positively. Parents should be aware that a positive attitude towards children and reading will help children gain a positive perspective towards reading. The more enjoyment and interest children have in reading, the more books they will want to read, the more frequently they will explore books, the more gain they will make.

Chapter III Conclusions and Recommendations

The present study explored whether home reading English books to Chinese children had a positive effect on enhancing their English as a foreign language acquisition on vocabulary,

attitude and interest towards reading based on existing literatures.

The findings presented in this study supported the argument that exposure to English books at home can provide a rich and meaningful context and help Chinese children acquire English in an interesting and effective way (Sheu, 2008). Specifically, the interaction between parents and children during shared English storybooks reading have a great impact on development of Chinese children's early English as a foreign language and literacy skills. For example, shared reading in English at home can positively enhanced Chinese children's receptive vocabulary, phonological awareness in syllable level, and word reading (Yeung & King 2015). While reading a storybook in English dialogically with children can improve their English word reading and phonological awareness (Chow et al. 2010). Similarly, the frequency of parent-child reading in English not only promotes Chinese children's English language development, but also enhances the enjoyment of their reading (Huang, 2004).

This paper suggests that parental influence such as parents' reading habits and interest towards reading are also important to build children's interest and affect children's attitude towards reading (Zhang, 2008). Other contributing factors include the families' socio-economic status and parental beliefs and expectations towards English learning; these factors strongly predict Chinese children's English achievement (Butler, 2013).

In China, due to recent legislation and interest in English acquisition at a young age, there are increasingly large numbers of young English language learners. This is due to the perspective that English proficiency is widely recognized as a "language of opportunity" which is considered as a basic skill to person's success. Therefore, reading English storybooks to Chinese children can be considered as an effective tool to provide an English language context for the child. It can also provide more opportunities for EFL children to learn English by encouraging them to answer

questions related to the story, retell the story, and engage them in various language English activities to lead their English acquisition.

It is important for Chinese parents who are interested in supporting their children English learning at young age to understand the significance of reading English storybooks to their children. It is equally important that they familiarize themselves with the strategies such as dialogic reading and shared reading in order to apply them properly when they share a storybook with their children. Parents are encouraged to start with choosing an interesting and age appropriate English storybooks according to their child's interest. As they share the book, encourage the child to express their feelings and ideas towards story, patiently guiding the children to respond in English. Meanwhile, parents should hold a positive view and behavior when reading English books to children, modeling a love of reading in order to cultivate children's love for books. Finally parents can provide children with more opportunities for access to English books by taking children to a private English library and borrowing English storybooks for them. Parents can also buy English books from online eBook stores to support children's English learning at home.

A final word of advice to parents: children naturally love stories and enjoy been read to by their parents. Chinese parents who wish for their young children to learn English in a natural, enjoyable, and inexpensive way should consider reading storybooks with them followed by suggestions described in the paper.

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