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# *A Study on the Effects of Multimedia on Children's Second Language Acquisition*

## *—Take Children's Song, Picture Book, and Animation as Examples*

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***Abstract:*** This study intends to find the impacts of multimedia on children's Second Language Acquisition (SLA) and provides suggestions. Nowadays children live in a multi-language environment naturally due to globalization. Multimedia then became a popular tool for children to learn a second language. The article reviews and analyses some research published in recent 5 years to trace how society, educators, and parents use multimedia to assist children's SLA. Taking Children's Song, Picture Book, and Animation as examples, the article includes background information and reasons for children to use multimedia as a second language acquisition tool. Meanwhile, since the paper mainly discusses Chinese children learning English as a second language, especially, it explains the connection between the tools and Chinese children. Based on the examples, the article expresses the influence of multimedia on children's SLA that multimedia resources could serve as a supplement for children to learn a new language because it stimulates multi-senses and encourages children's learning. This article brings forward 3 suggestions, for parents, educators, and publishers respectively, trying to find ways to better promote children's SLA. However, multimedia also features shallow information, so if children ELFs stick to multimedia as the main method to acquire language, they cannot build a profound understanding of it, which may cause more harm than good.

***Keywords:*** SLA, children, multimedia, education

## 1. Introduction

After entering the 21st century, digital publishments renewed the way people learn new things. Especially, languages are much more accessible. The connections among countries in the whole world became closer and as the most popular language internationally, the number of English learners soars with the development of multimedia learning resources. China took the initiative to attach great importance to English education since the late 1950s, and children start learning English from kindergarten or early grades in primary school in the late 1970s and early 1980s [1]. To raise children's interests and maintain their focus on language learning, multimedia contributes a lot: for instance, Children's Song, Picture Book, Animation, and so on. These digital publishments assist young learners to learn English and strengthen their language ability. However, problems also emerge.

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Although multimedia compresses various information into a relatively short and small carrier, it still has the characteristic of modern media that the content is usually simple and shallow, easy to be accepted, and most of the information remains at an entertaining surface but does not provoke deep thinking.

The article is a study analyzing the influence of multimedia on children's Second Language Learning through the lens of literature analysis. To be more specific, the article is considering the impact of multimedia on Chinese children learning English as a second language.

This article first recognizes the importance of using multimedia as a way to learn a language, then the author lists 3 resources, Children's Song, Picture Book, and Animation to be specific, to seek deeper into the topic and discuss the pros and cons of the resources. In line accordance with the above analysis, the author comes up with her understanding of the impact of multimedia on children's second language acquisition. Three suggestions are provided to parents, language educators, and publishers after Inspiration. Finally, the author summarizes the study.

This paper seeks to understand the impact of numerous multimedia language learning resources on children's second language acquisition to help educators and parents teach language more easily, children learn the authentic language efficiently, and publishers design and introduce digital language learning materials reliably.

## 2. Multimedia English Learning Resources

### 2.1. Children's Song

In almost all cultures around the world, children's song is the primary way to aid children who are in the starting stage of learning to get familiar with a new language. When learning their native language, or first language, a large number of children learn the basic grammar and expressions by repeating the simple lyrics. In the case of second language learners, on the other hand, children's song becomes a window for those youngsters to peek into a new language. Based on Critical Period Hypothesis, child learners hold the most significant advantage in acquiring phonology [2]. The slow rhythm, precise and exaggerated pronunciation, and repetition of the main lyrics help children develop correct pronunciation habits and acquire other knowledge such as vocabulary and grammar better and faster. Meanwhile, this means enhancing young learners' impressions of words, phrases, and sentences while nurturing aesthetic literacy at an early age. The format of children's song is appropriate to children's tastes at the same time, which arise children's interest.

Children's song is also the most accessible multimedia resource for second language learning. The process for a child to learn a language is influenced by many external factors, for instance, the age of onset, language input, and family socioeconomic status [3]. Some other multimedia resources, such as picture books, cartoons, films, etc., require the parents to have enough ability to sift out the good for their children. These resources cannot be easily downloaded from the internet at a time when copyright is increasingly important. On the contrary, children's song is less difficult to obtain, and the music library within the apps installed on smartphones can basically meet children's needs. The cost is low. In China, the price of a paid single song is around 3-5 yuan, and the subscription fee for music or video applications is about 12-18 yuan per month, which are acceptable for the majority. Compared with the cost of animation DVDs or picture books that may cost tens to hundreds of yuan, children's song is more economical. Additionally, parents are aware of the importance of antenatal training with music and foreign languages in children's early development, so naturally, they use children's song as a multimedia resource consciously.

To sum up, Children's Song is used widely to help children acquire a second language because of its low cost, availability, and efficiency. It is also recognized as a resultful way to help children to shape pure pronunciation.

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However, since the capacity of a song is limited, Children's Song can only be applied in the early stage of learning elementary knowledge of a language. To move one step further, as mentioned above, Picture Book can also be helpful for young EFLs.

## 2.2. Picture Book

Picture Book refers to a type of children's book with beautiful pictures and short text on each page to tell a tale. Derived from 17th-century Europe, Picture Book became popular during the 20th century in the Western world. In the 1990s, a soaring number of Picture Books were published in mainland China, influenced by its hit in Japan and Taiwan [4].

Since Europe and the United States have a long history of creating Picture Book, many of their works not only have wonderful drawings but also lively language. Therefore, most of the English Picture Books introduced into China have become one of the most influential sources for Chinese children to understand English culture and language. Moreover, as more and more Chinese children get in touch with English at a young age, many Picture Books nowadays are bilingual versions. Through reading Picture Books, children unconsciously develop their capability to transfer two languages and learn situational communication expressions. Instead of learning grammatical rules for creating sentences, they understand some frequently use sentence patterns and phrases as fixed patterns, which help them develop a sense of language.

Picture Book featured easy but precise language and fine pictures. For one thing, the beautiful drawings provide direct sources for Chinese children to construct an overall impression of foreign cultures. For another, the language of Picture Books is suitable for children to learn a new language. It is close to children's daily life, at the same time, the sentences are simple and interesting, which immerse children into the stories naturally and apply them to their everyday scenes. Furthermore, the text and pictures are two complementary factors. Compared with picture which is direct and figurative, text is an indirect and abstract medium. However, when the two corporates together, the meaning and moral of a Picture Book could be illustrated clearly to children without little hinder.

According to Zhang's comparison concerning Public Library English Picture Book Reading Promotion and English Class, Guangzhou Children's Library held a Picture Book reading activity that inspires to integrate of Picture Books into second language education [4]. The Picture Book the librarians promoted was Please, Mr. Panda. The story is about Mr. Panda wanting to share his doughnuts with his friends, everyone wants those doughnuts, however, no one says "please" or "thank you" to Mr. Panda. In the end, Mr. Panda gives all his doughnuts to a lemur, who is good-mannered. Children are encouraged to master the following sentences after reading the book: 1) Would you like a doughnut? 2) May I have a doughnut? 3) Thank you very much! 4) You are welcome. In order to assist children to explore deeper into the story, the librarians held a series of activities to attract children's attention. The librarians design 3 stages of activities: first, they guide the children to guess what is Mr. Panda and who he wants to share his doughnuts with. Then they read the story in English, with some Chinese interspersed, to construct an overview of the story. To grab children's attention, they read and act briskly to imitate different animals and depict the characters of those animals. Finally, the librarians led the children to read the highlighted sentences. If they are able to use those sentences, they can gain plasticine from the organizers to make doughnuts. After making doughnuts, each child would be assigned a role in and act out the story with their hand-made "doughnuts".

Obviously, the Picture Book serves as an effective tool to help children acquire a second language. The combination of pictures and stories constitutes one of the most effective methods of teaching a language [5]. But limitation exists. Though the educational meaning it conveys is often beyond the superficial meaning of the story, its language is easy to grasp. Thus, the consumption is large. Children keep growing quickly, and their learning level is upgrading in a fast pace, which needs other

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material to add harder vocabulary and grammar. Similarly, animation assists children to learn a second language.

### 2.3. Animation/Cartoon

Amination is one of the most welcoming modern media for children. Known for its splendid form of presentation and interesting story, animation is regarded as a convenient method for children to be stimulated by language [6]. Animations from companies such as Disney, Pixar, and Universal Pictures provide warm and sophisticated images and meanwhile, are authentic material for children to learn English. Providing for native English-speaking children, animation is also an effective tool for young EFLs to engage in real language environments.

In China, the enthusiasm to learn English is getting even higher these years. Parents intend to create a good English learning environment for their children from kindergarten or primary school. Animation pops out and proved to be a suitable assistant. Animation is an authentic audio-visual material. Based on real-world context, it rearranges the episodes on a daily basis to become more exciting and interesting coming-of-age stories. This way of learning a second language not only saves parents' time and energy by allowing their children to follow the plot to understand the meaning on their own but also has a positive psychological impact on young EFLs that is to reduce their sense of boredom and intimidation in the process of acquiring a second language [6].

As Zhang claims in his paper, children like visually stimulating, bright, and eye-catching elements that appeal to their senses and activate their aspiration to learn new things [7]. It indicates that the cartoon perfectly matches the essential features of children's learning habits. In addition, unlike picture books or story books, cartoons tell stories automatically to children, and whether children are active or passive recipients, their brains are subconsciously stimulated by the dialogues on the TV. Therefore, watching cartoons could be an active language input for young EFLs.

To sum up, animation can also be recognized as a valid way for Chinese children to better learn English. This is a method that can be implied both in class and at home [8]. Animation is in line with today's children's habit of accepting fast-paced things, thus, it can arise the interest of the children to know more about English and promote their language-learning process.

## 3. Implications and Suggestions

The rapid development of multimedia has been both a boon and, to some extent, a disaster for children's second language acquisition. Digital publications have many advantages for children learning a second language, such as convenience, vividness, and variety. They have advanced the previous mode of learning a foreign language only through single-sensory stimulation, such as reading textbooks and listening to tapes, and changed it to mobilizing multiple senses to assist second language learning together, which greatly enhances the efficiency and effectiveness of learning and is helpful in enhancing children's interest and attraction in learning. In addition, the use of multimedia can help to reduce teachers' teaching pressure, avoid dull and boring teaching, and improve the language teaching and learning effect significantly, and so on. However, it is also worth noting that children's favour of digital publications tends to stay on shallow understanding, and once the habit is developed, it does harm to children's future school learning. Therefore, multimedia materials should be used as a supplement rather than a staple food for children's second language acquisition in order to better enhance the effectiveness of second language learning.

For the effectiveness of children's second language acquisition, it is important to consider whether the foundation is solid enough. Digital publications and multimedia technology help to enhance interest, but they are more inclined to be technical means or even just an aid. The key is still the guidance to deep learning: cultivating children's sensitivity to language from the beginning, and

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developing the habit of length reading. Based on the above, the author makes the following suggestions in the hope of would be of use to children's second language acquisition to some extent.

1) In domestic education, parents could choose appropriate English multimedia materials for their children as part of early education to provide a supportive second language learning environment for children. As Caldas suggests, the family is both the place where language policy begins and where it ends [9].

2) In the classroom, teachers can use a variety of English multimedia materials to support classroom instruction and lead children to be interested in the second language in the first place. Systematic learning of a second language without rejecting it is the way to get better results. In addition, teachers can also use graded English multimedia materials, such as graded storybooks and animated movies, to help students improve their mastery of the second language in a more detailed way.

3) Publishers should also pay more attention to this area and carefully select multimedia resources that target various age groups. By referring to Graded Reading Systems such as The Lexile Framework for Reading, Accelerated Reader (AR), Guided Reading Level (GRL), and Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA), the publishers could better help guide children to read or view from an easy level to an advanced level in a step-by-step manner [10]. At the same time, publishers should also monitor the content and even adjust it appropriately according to the actual situation of the country or region, and publish suitable digital publications for local children.

## 4. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study discusses whether these 3 multimedia, Children's Songs, Picture Books, and Animation, can assist children in second language acquisition based on past literature.

Generally speaking, all three means can enhance children's interest in second language learning and prolong their concentration. Some experimental studies have also demonstrated that the use of multimedia is better at helping children acquire grammar and vocabulary. Of course, the use of multimedia still has an obvious disadvantage that it does not develop children's habits of deep reading and deep thinking. Therefore, multimedia should be used as a new and auxiliary tool for children's second language acquisition, and should not become the main way for children to learn a second language.

The author sets out the study to answer a frequently asked question that whether multimedia can cultivate children's interest and ability to learn a language. Based on the author's professional learning and literature research, the author wishes to solve this query at least to some degree.

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