

Challenges of a Parent-Kid English Learning Program in a Remote Elementary School: A Case Study

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Abstract: Teaching English to fifth and sixth graders in Taiwan elementary schools became compulsory in the fall semester of 2001. Starting from the fall semester in 2005, the whole of Taiwan has implemented English education from the third grade in elementary schools. In addition, the MOE has promoted foreign language learning for everyone, a policy that has been emphasized on the white paper *Toward Learning Society*. Of the various foreign language learning courses, in 2003 the MOE began to subsidize Parent-Kid English Learning Programs (PKELP) around the island.

In 2005, a remote elementary school in Taipei County was the first to apply for a subsidy for the PKELP. This paper aims to describe in depth how the PKELP was implemented at this remote elementary school in Taiwan.

Keywords: Parent-Kid English Learning Program, elementary school, English education, curriculum, remote area

I. Introduction

To equip the e-generation with good instructional technology, English, as well as creative skills, is one of the goals issued under the “Challenge 2008: National Development Plan” of Executive Yuan, Taiwan, R.O.C. In order to achieve this goal, the government has devoted itself to developing an English living environment and enhancing the English proficiency levels of the populace. The central government, the local government, schools, and entrepreneurs have worked together to develop an English living environment, to balance urban and rural English education resources, enhance people’s English proficiency levels, and so forth.

Teaching English to fifth and sixth graders in Taiwan elementary schools became compulsory in the fall semester of 2001. Starting from the fall semester in 2005, the whole of Taiwan has implemented English education from the third grade in elementary schools. The Ministry of Education (MOE) announced three major goals in elementary and junior high school English education: to obtain basic English communication skills, to cultivate correct learning interests and attitudes and to learn more about foreign and domestic culture and

customs.

In addition, the MOE has promoted foreign language learning for everyone, a policy that has been emphasized on the white paper *Toward Learning Society*. Of the various foreign language learning courses, in 2003 the MOE began to subsidize Parent-Kid English Learning Programs (PKELP) around the island, for which each school was subsidized USD\$ 909 (NT\$30, 000). The subsidy included USD\$484.8 (NT\$16,000) for a twenty-hour salary for instructors, USD\$181.8 (NT\$6,000) for a twenty-hour salary for assistants, a USD\$151.5 (NT\$5,000) location fee, and USD\$90.9 (NT\$3,000) for handouts. Starting from the spring semester of 2005, the subsidy decreased to USD\$890.9 (NT\$29,400) for each PKELP, including USD\$587.8 (NT\$19,400) for a twenty-four-hour salary for instructors, USD\$218.1 (NT\$7,200) for a twenty-four-hour salary for assistants, and USD\$90.9 (NT\$3,000) for handouts.

In 2005, a remote elementary school in Taipei County was the first to apply for a subsidy for the PKELP. This paper aims to describe in depth how the PKELP was implemented at this remote elementary school in Taiwan. First of all, it addresses questions such as when and how was the PKELP implemented? What were the contents of the PKELP? Who was involved in promoting this program? Next, what assessments were carried out to evaluate students in the PKELP? In addition, did the PKELP really make a difference in improving students' English abilities, their attitudes toward English, and their cultural awareness? Furthermore, was there any way to modify the PKELP to make it more effective? Finally, suggestions will be given on implementing the PKELP as a reference for educational policy-making bodies, elementary schools, teacher-preparation institutes and universities.

II. Literature Review

The literature review in this research will focus on two aspects. One is the current situation of English education in remote areas in Taiwan and the other is parents' role in children's English learning.

1. Problems of English Education in Elementary Schools in Remote Areas

English instruction became compulsory for fifth and sixth graders in Taiwan elementary schools starting in the fall semester of 2001. In the fall semester of 2005, all provinces in Taiwan launched English education programs in elementary schools that began instruction in the third grade. The English proficiency level of the students and the effectiveness of English education may vary due to the selection of different textbooks, the students' backgrounds and socioeconomic status, and learning strategies, among other variables. In this paper, the researchers will focus mainly on the problems of English education programs in elementary

schools in remote areas.

Su (2004) discovered some problems with English education in three elementary schools in remote regions in Central Taiwan. In terms of English teachers, English teachers in remote regions tend to have a higher turnover rate than in urban areas, and they are often less willing to teach English again. Also, since remote regions are often inconvenient in terms of transportation and lifestyle, there is constantly a shortage of teachers. Furthermore, due to these factors and heavy pressure placed upon them by the workload, the majority of support teachers are not enthusiastic about English teaching.

As for the problems with English education, students in remote regions have no contact with English speaking, apart from in the class; furthermore, there are only two hours of English classes per week, which is not optimal for English learning. Additionally, due to the shortage of teachers, the requirement for supporter teachers or supply teachers is crucial, as it leads to a concentration of English classes in the subject time table, which creates frustration for the students, and thus low-standard teaching outcomes. Also, in remote regions there is often a great difference in the students' levels of ability, and the students' English levels of aptitude tend to be in the extreme, thus making teaching more difficult. Moreover, the English level of the students in remote regions is so low that the English classes are often taught in Chinese (Su, 2004).

According to Chang (2004), the problems with elementary school English education in remote areas in Hsinchu were as follows. First of all, there was a shortage of qualified elementary school English teachers in remote areas, and remote schools did not have sufficient instructional media. English teachers in remote areas did not have much opportunity to pursue professional development.

Jhang (2004) investigated the conditions and resources of the English learning of the elementary students in urban, rural, and remote area in both Hsinchu and Taoyuang counties. Jhang discovered that the students in remote areas showed less willingness to learn English. Therefore, there were few teacher-student interactions in English class in these areas. Furthermore, compared to parents of the students in urban areas, parents in remote areas were less concerned about their children's learning of English.

To sum up, the lack of qualified English teachers, insufficient teaching materials, less opportunities for professional development for English teachers, a big gap between learners' English proficiency levels, and less enthusiasm for learning English among students were the major problems in terms of English education in remote areas.

2. Parents' Roles in Children's English Language

The participation of parents in their children's education has positive impacts on their achievement (Careaga, 1988; Kauffman, 2001; Tinkler, 2002). According to Wang (2000), differences in family background affect English learning among elementary school students in Kaohsiung. In this study, students did not have an adequate English learning environment at home; therefore, they did not cultivate good English learning attitudes and their English proficiency needed improvement.

According to Chien (2004), significant differences in the frequencies of strategies used in learning English, the degrees of motivation in learning English, and English learning achievements were present among students of different genders as well as students with different backgrounds in terms of their parents' education and vocations.

Wang (2004) investigated the process and effects of the PKELP in a municipal library in Taipei. She found that both parents and children benefited from learning English together through various activities, whereby the children's attitudes to learning English transformed from reluctance to active participation. Furthermore, increasing English conversation between parents and children, increasing similar learning experiences and topics, various interactions between parents and children, and facilitating interaction among family members were the factors to the interactions between parents and children.

In conclusion, the parents' participation in their children's language education makes a difference in language learners' achievement. Furthermore, such participation helps parents develop their skills too. When parents learn English with children, they set a good example for their children, increase their own confidence and abilities, and better understand their children's school experiences.

III. Methods

The questionnaire on the PKELP was designed to identify students' concepts of the program. The questionnaire included three parts. The first part was students' background information. The second part aimed to determine students' attitudes toward the administration work for the PKELP and included five questions. The third part aimed to obtain students' feedback on the curriculum design for the PKELP and included ten questions. Students could choose from "totally agree," "agree," "somewhat agree," "disagree," and "totally disagree."

IV. A Case Study on Parent-Kid English Learning Program

In this section, an in-depth case study on PKELP in a remote elementary school is

introduced, including the school's background, students' background, curriculum, teaching procedures, worksheets, and oral assessments.

1. School and Students' Background

The PKELP was implemented in a remote elementary school. It was located on the north point of Taiwan, backed by the mountains and facing the ocean. The school had one-hundred years of history. Of all the twenty-seven staff members, most were novice teachers with little teaching experience. The school had 11 classes, with only two hundred and thirty students. Most of the students' parents were blue-collar workers. Due to cultural and economic disadvantages, students had fewer chances to learn English outside school.

2. Curriculum on Parent-Kid English Learning Program

The PKELP was implemented on Wednesday evening from P.M. 6:30 to 8:30 and Saturday morning from A.M. 9:00 to 11:00. Five topics were chosen, including classroom English, alphabet reviews, numbers, Thanksgiving, weather, and days of the week. While the main focus on Wednesday evening was vocabulary and basic English conversation and dialogue instruction, the emphasis on Saturday morning was on the introduction of picture books to develop both parents' and children's literacy.

The instructor on Wednesday was the full-time substitute teacher in this elementary school and held a B.A. in business. After graduating from college, she took the elementary school English teacher training courses in National Taiwan University of Education. She had only one year of teaching experience.

The instructor on Saturday was a qualified English teacher, who had passed the Ministry of Education's 1999 Elementary English Teacher Qualification Exam in Taiwan. She had her Master's degree in Applied Linguistics and TESOL at Indiana University. She had been teaching English in an elementary school in a rural area in Taipei County for four years and was appointed to teach the PKELP.

Table 1: *Syllabus on Weekend Parent-Kid English Learning Program*

Weeks	Topics	Picture books
1	(1) Classroom English (2) Alphabet Review	<u>David Goes to School</u>
2	Numbers	(1) <u>Ten Black Dots</u> (2) <u>The Doorbell Rang</u>
3	Thanksgiving	<u>Celebrating Thanksgiving</u>
4	Weather	<u>Rain</u>

5	Days of the Week	<u>Today is Monday</u>
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3. Teaching Procedure

The teaching procedures in the PKELP included warm-up, presentation, practice, production, and wrap-up. Songs or puppet shows were used to motivate students in the warm-up. As an example, the topic “weather” was used, and the song How’s the Weather? was used as a warm-up song. The song went like this:

How’s the Weather?

How’s the weather?

It’s sunny.

How’s the weather?

It’s sunny.

It’s sunny today.

In the presentation, the teacher introduced the story by showing the class the cover. Students could guess what the story would be from the cover. Big books, original picture books, or PowerPoint files were used interchangeably. After the storytelling, the students were required to share what they heard.

In the practice, the teacher introduced key words, phrases, and sentence patterns from the picture books. Various activities were designed to familiarize students with key words, phrases, sentence patterns, and main ideas from the picture books. A listening comprehension activity, such as Listen and Do or Mime, was followed by a speaking activity like surveying or Bingo; finally, Concentration and other exercises were used for word recognition and spelling.

In the production stage, students had to complete worksheets for each picture book. If time allowed, students were required to design mini-books in different shapes, such as a six-page mini-book for David Goes to School, or an accordion book for Rain.

In the wrap-up stage, students were required to share the ideas written on their worksheets or retell their story. Evaluation criteria on mini-books were given as follows: 10% on format (e.g. page number, book title, student’s name), 25% on grammar and handwriting (e.g. space between words, capital letter at the beginning of the sentence, correct punctuation, clear and neat handwriting), 25% on creativity (e.g. originality), 20% on layout (e.g. coloring, drawing), and 20% on presentation (e.g. clarity, fluency).

4. Worksheets

Worksheets were designed for each topic as necessary. Various types of exercises were included in the worksheets, such as matching the word with the corresponding picture, interviewing, ticking, writing down a recipe or things that students were thankful for, and so forth.

Take the topic “weather” as an example. One of the worksheets was titled “information gap.” Students worked as a pair and each had one handout. Students had to ask their partner about the weather in different cities in Taiwan to complete the worksheet. The other one was to find words related to weather in the word search worksheet, such as *rainy*, *sunny*, *cloudy*, *windy*, and so forth.

5. Oral Assessment

A scavenger hunt (see appendix II) was given on the last day of the class. The scavenger hunt was divided into five sections: saying the sounds and names of the twenty-six alphabet letters, counting from one to ten, naming the days of the week, saying three words related to Thanksgiving, and singing How’s the Weather? or Where is Pumpkin? Parents and kids who could say all sentences would get five seals on their worksheet and win the prize.

IV. Analysis

The questionnaire was given and answered on December 17, 2005. A total of twenty subjects answered the questionnaire. Of all respondents, five were male and the rest were female. In terms of age, eight students were aged seven to eight years and six were aged nine to ten years. While there were three students aged eleven to twelve, there were three adults aged thirty to forty years. Of these three adults, two had junior-high-school education and one had senior-high-school education. All of them were housewives. As for their English learning experience, eight had no English learning experience; three had less than one year; and another three had one to two years’ English learning experience. The three adults had had more than five years’ English learning experience since junior high school.

1. Analysis of Attitudes Toward the Administration Work in the PKELP

All of the respondents were satisfied with the school’s advertisement, the efforts of school administrators, and registration in the PKELP. The school sent the flyer and registration form for the PKELP to all the students in the school. Students and parents who were interested in taking the class handed in the registration form to the school before the deadline.

Seventy percent of the respondents replied that they were satisfied with the classroom arrangement for the PKELP. Seventy percent of the respondents said that they were satisfied with the class schedule for the PKELP.

Table 2: *Attitudes Toward the Administration Work*

Items	Totally agreed	Agreed	Somewhat agreed	Disagreed	Totally disagreed
1. I was satisfied with the school's advertisement of the PKELP.	16	4	0	0	0
2. I was satisfied with the classroom arrangement for the PKELP.	10	4	3	2	1
3. I was satisfied with the class schedule for the PKELP.	8	6	3	2	1
4. I was satisfied with the registration for the PKELP.	15	5	0	0	0
5. I was satisfied with the efforts of school administrators in implementing the PKELP.	13	7	0	0	0

2. Analysis of Feedback on the Curriculum Design of the PKELP

All of the respondents had positive attitudes toward the PKELP, saying that they learned English and enjoyed learning English from the PKELP. Only three housewives accompanied their children to learn English in the PKELP and they agreed that they enjoyed learning English with their parents/kids; however the rest of the students did not agree with the statement. Seventy percent of the respondents claimed that they had been motivated to learn English by the PKELP. Unfortunately three students disagreed with this statement. They were the fifth and sixth graders at the ages of eleven and twelve. They had been forced by their parents to attend the PKELP in order to be immersed in an English learning environment.

All of the respondents had positive attitudes toward the use of picture books as teaching materials, the activities and worksheets used in the class, and the oral assessment given at the end of the curriculum.

Table 3: *Feedback on the Curriculum Design*

Items	Totally agreed	Agreed	Somewhat agreed	Disagreed	Totally disagreed
1. I learned English from the PKELP.	20	0	0	0	0

2. I enjoyed learning English from the PKELP.	18	2	0	0	0
3. I enjoyed learning English with my parents/kids.	6	0	0	17	0
4. I have been motivated to learn English by the PKELP.	10	4	3	2	1
5. I learned a different culture from the PKELP.	12	4	4	0	0
6. I was interested in the topics that the teacher chose for the PKELP.	13	7	0	0	0
7. Picture books that the teacher used in the classroom helped me learn English.	18	2	0	0	0
8. Activities that the teacher used in the classroom helped me learn English.	19	1	0	0	0
9. Worksheets that the teacher used in the classroom helped me learn English	12	4	4	0	0
10. The oral assessment that the teacher designed in the classroom helped me learn English.	13	7	0	0	0

V. Discussion

This paper aims to describe in depth how the PKELP was implemented at a remote elementary school in Taiwan. Five findings are identified.

1. Satisfaction of Administration Work in the PKELP

All of the respondents were satisfied with the school's advertisement, the efforts of school administrators, and registration in the PKELP, except for the classroom arrangement and schedule arrangement

Seventy percent of the respondents replied that they were satisfied with the classroom

arrangement for the PKELP, which was held in the audio-visual classroom on the third floor. However, a few respondents preferred to have the class on the first floor, in the regular classroom. The adults thought the audio-visual classroom was good for a lecture but not appropriate for classroom activities.

Seventy percent of the respondents said that they were satisfied with the class schedule for the PKELP. However, adults preferred to have the class on a weekday rather than on the weekend, because they could then have learned English for ten weeks, for two hours per week.

2. Positive Attitudes Toward the PKELP

The analysis of the questionnaire also reveals that all subjects in this study had positive attitudes toward the PKELP, because both adults and children enjoyed learning English in the class. They considered the importance of obtaining basic English communication skills and cultivating correct English learning interests and attitudes. Therefore, the government should continue to provide subsidies for implementing the PKELP. Hence, the goal “to cultivate an e-generation with good instruction technology, English, and creative skills” would be achieved gradually by the year 2008.

3. Benefits of Using Picture Books in the PKELP

The analysis of the questionnaire also reveals that all subjects in this study thought the picture books that the teacher used in the classroom helped them learn English. The use of picture books in English language teaching has several benefits. Stories are motivating and can help develop positive attitudes in students. Learning English through stories can help students acquire basic language functions and structures, vocabulary, and language-learning skills. Moreover, stories can be chosen to link English with other subjects across the curriculum. In addition, picture books encourage cross-cultural comparison and learning. Storybooks cater to different learning styles and develop students’ different types of intelligence (Ellis, 2002).

4. Benefits of Using Various Activities in the PKELP

The analysis of the questionnaire also reveals that all subjects in this study thought the activities that the teacher used in the classroom helped them learn English. Communicative language teaching (CLT) has been widely promoted in elementary school English education in Taiwan. CLT uses activities that can engage learners in authentic communication, particularly the following two major activity types: functional communication activities, aiming at developing certain language skills and functions; and social interaction activities, such as conversation, discussion sessions, dialogues, and role plays (Brown, 2000; Galloway,

1993; Lanier, 1998; Richards 1997). Therefore, abundant communicative language activities should be provided in the classroom so learners will be able to develop basic English communication skills. When constructing lessons, the teacher needs to predict the possible needs of the students and have communicative language activities readily available to meet these needs. The activities should be designed so that the students experience a high degree of success. Teachers will also experience greater success when activities are planned around the students' interests.

5. Importance of Evaluation in the PKELP

The analysis of the questionnaire also reveals that all subjects in this study thought the oral assessment that the teacher designed in the classroom helped them learn English. Evaluation and teaching are interrelated. Evaluation is a part of teaching, as are the materials, syllabus, and approach used in the classroom. Evaluation provides students with important feedback and makes teachers accountable for their work.

There were some potential problems and challenges when the PKELP was implemented in the elementary school. First of all, there was a shortage of qualified elementary school English teachers in remote areas. The teacher in this elementary school was not willing to teach the entire twenty-hour curriculum. The school had to hire other teachers to solve the problem. Second, there was less parents' participation in the PKELP. The original plan of the PKELP was to have an adult (a father, mother, grandfather, grandmother, etc.) accompany his/her child to learn English together. However, in this study only three adults attended the PKELP with their children. In addition, students in this elementary school had not had much contact with English learning, not to mention picture books. The teaching materials were insufficient in this school. Moreover, the age of learners in this PKELP ranged from seven to forty. Such a great age range made it difficult to design classroom activities. Finally, the English proficiency level in this PKELP varied from learning English for more than five years to having no English learning experience whatsoever. Such a big gap made it difficult to choose appropriate topics, activities, picture books, and assessments in the class.

VI. Conclusion

The following five suggestions are provided to help teachers and school administrator to implement the PKELP more effectively.

1. Promotion of the PKELP Together in One Community or Area

There was a shortage of qualified elementary school English teachers in remote areas, particularly in teaching this PKELP. It is strongly suggested that elementary schools in one specific remote area apply for the PKELP and hire one qualified and experienced teacher

together. By doing so, students in one specific area or community can benefit from learning English.

2. Importance of Parents and Children Learning English Together

The original plan of the PKELP was to have an adult (a father, mother, grandfather, grandmother, etc.) accompany his/her child to learn English together. However, in this study only three adults attended the PKELP with their children. Therefore, it is important to emphasize to parents the advantages of parents and children learning English together. First, parents and children gain a great understanding of one another through parent-child co-learning. Second, parent-child co-learning provides great opportunities for parents and children to communicate with each other, which helps learners to review what they have learned. Third, during parent-child co-learning parents and children look to one another as good examples of learners.

3. Importance of Using Various Teaching Materials

Students in this elementary school in the remote area did not have much access to English learning, not to mention picture books. The teaching materials were insufficient in this school. The Bureau of Education in Taipei County had provided subsidies for schools to apply to purchase picture books, English CD, videos, and so forth. The variety of teaching materials can be used to stimulate the students' interest in learning. Therefore, schools should try their best to apply for these materials. Furthermore, a wide selection of ready-made materials about teaching picture books can be found on the websites; teachers can download them for free.

4. Emphasis of Designing Curriculum in Depth and Width

The great age range and pronounced English proficiency gap among learners in this PKELP made it difficult to design classroom activities. Therefore, it is suggested that curricula should be designed in a more in-depth manner. The same topic with various activities should be designed to cater to different age and proficiency levels.

Take the topic "number" as an example. Beginning and younger learners can be taught to count only from one to ten and sing simple children's songs, such as Ten Little Indians. Intermediate and older learners can learn to count to one hundred, tell time, order things, and so forth. More advanced and adult learners could learn to read graphs and report on them.

5. Value of Designing the Local-Based Curriculum

Students were satisfied with the topics chosen in the PKELP. Topics related to learners' lives, such as the local-based curriculum, should be integrated into the PKELP. This school was in an area that is famous for its kite festival, rice dumplings, and seafood, among other

things. These topics should be introduced to the curriculum. To learn more about foreign and domestic cultures and customs is one of the goals for elementary school English education in Taiwan. Therefore, the design of a local-based curriculum is an alternative approach to help students not only learn English but also compare and contrast foreign and domestic cultures.

Several areas still need to be investigated in order more completely to understand the effects of PKELP in English education in remote elementary schools. One area that needs to be addressed concerns parents' and learners' attitudes toward and perceptions of the importance of PKELP into their English learning.

This research focused on only one case study in a remote elementary school. Further studies should be conducted within schools in Taipei County or other cities in Taiwan. Future studies should also address the question: Is there any difference regarding the effects of the PKELP in remote elementary schools in different cities?

Another study should be conducted with more students of different ages and with different English proficiency levels and should address the question: Is there any difference regarding the effects of the PKELP among beginner, intermediate or advanced English learners?

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Appendix I

Questionnaires on the PKELP

Part I: Background Information

1. Gender

Male Female

2. Age:

7-8 9-10 11-12 13-20
 21-30 31-40 41-50 More than 50

3. Educational background

elementary school junior high school senior high school
 college and university graduate school

4. English learning experience

None Less than 1 year 1-2 years 3-4 years
 More than 5 years

5. Occupation

student service industry
 manufacture military, public and teaching personnel
 instructional technology industry housewife
 professional construction
 other (be specific): _____

Part II: Attitudes Toward the Administration Work

Items	Totally agreed	Agreed	Somewhat agreed	Disagreed	Totally disagreed
1. I was satisfied with the school’s advertisement of the PKELP.					
2. I was satisfied with the classroom arrangement for the PKELP.					
3. I was satisfied with the class schedule for the PKELP.					
4. I was satisfied with the registration for the PKELP.					
5. I was satisfied with efforts of school administrators in implementing the PKELP.					

Part III: Feedback on the Curriculum Design

Items	Totally agreed	Agreed	Somewhat agreed	Disagreed	Totally disagreed
1. I learned English from the PKELP.					
2. I enjoyed learning English from the PKELP.					
3. I enjoyed learning English with my parents/kids.					
4. I have been motivated to learn English by the PKELP.					
5. I learned a different culture from the PKELP.					
6. I was interested in the topics that the teacher chose for the PKELP.					
7. Picture books that the teacher used in the classroom helped me learn English.					
8. Activities that the teacher used in the classroom helped me learn English.					
9. Worksheets that the teacher used in the classroom helped me learn English					
10. The oral assessment that the teacher designed in the classroom helped me learn English					

Part IV

Please write down your suggestions.

Appendix II**Worksheet on the Scavenger Hunt for PKELP****Name:** _____

Stops	1	2	3	4	5
Contents	26 alphabets	1-10	Days of weeks	Thanksgiving words	Sing-along
Stamps					