A Comparative Study on Bilingual and Monolingual Online Kids’ English Lessons*

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Because of COVID-19 pandemic, online kids English lessons becoming more and more popular. There are two main types of lessons on line: bilingual online kids’ English lessons and monolingual online English lessons. By observing 40 samples, including 20 monolingual lessons and 20 bilingual lessons, the author found the two kinds of lessons differ in ways to lead in, in methods of enabling and in conclusion. And there are also some subtle differences in teaching contents, classroom teaching expressions, teaching environments, and teaching modes. In the end, the paper also puts forward some measures to improve kids’ online English teaching qualities.

Keywords: kids English teaching, online lessons, bilingual online English lessons, monolingual online English lessons

Introduction

Parents attach greater and greater importance to kids’ English learning. Many kids start English learning before primary school education, since it is better and easier for kids to develop good English pronunciation and intonation. According to Patricia Kuhl (2010), a technology, entertainment, and design (TED) speaker, babies are genius of language learning, and the ability to learning language begin to reduce at the age of seven. The second reason is that kids will be busy with their academic studies, especially in secondary school; starting English learning at an early age is helpful for relieving students’ academic pressure. In addition, English is so widely used that we need it to solve global issues, such as pandemic, disease, poverty, etc.. The whole world are pushing the use of English, which provides a temptation to take a lead at an early age. Therefore, many parents choose foreign teacher classes for their kids, so that they can get standard and authentic English from the first beginning.

Many scholars and researchers have found big differences in kids’ English lessons given by foreign teachers and Chinese teachers. Zhang (2020) took one of the early education institutions in Shanghai and made a comparative study on teaching activities of Chinese and foreign preschool English teachers. According to her study, Chinese and foreign teachers differ in teaching contents, teaching methods, teaching expressions, and teaching environmental creation. By means of observing in the classroom, Zheng (2020) found there were foreign and Chinese teachers have different games for lead-in, teaching, and practice. Chinese teachers tend to

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focus on syllabus, following some general steps, while foreign teachers may give priority to students’ interesting; which make games more flexible. Besides, Chinese teachers often play as an organizer but foreign teachers are often participants. Ding and Wang (2019) made a comparative study on English teaching activities in kindergartens given by Chinese teachers and foreign teachers and found English teaching can enrich teaching activities in kindergartens, and called for Chinese teachers to pay more attention to pronunciations and basic sentences, and foreign teachers to pay more attention to teaching efficiency and teaching contents.

After the outbreak of COVID-19, online class is becoming more and more popular, so are the online foreign teacher lessons. Besides, along with the so-called “double reduction policy” in the second half of 2021, which means to ease the burden of excessive homework and off-campus tutoring for students undergoing compulsory education, there is a big change in education sector, and kids English teaching is also strongly affected. No more English lessons on weekends or during summer and winter vocation, and no more extra classes after 8 pm every day. As a result, more and more parents turn to online classes for improving students’ academic performance, and for the same reason, many parents choose online foreign teacher lessons for their kids to learn English. According to the previous study, there are two kinds of online English lessons for kids: monolingual online English lessons given by foreign teachers and bilingual online English lessons given by Chinese teachers and foreign teachers together. Are there any differences between monolingual online English lessons and bilingual ones? What are they? These questions are the main research points of this thesis.

The Design of This Comparative Study

The objects of this comparative research are monolingual online English lessons and bilingual ones, and the differences between the two (40 samples online lessons, including 20 monolingual lessons and 20 bilingual lessons), are chosen from different Apps, such as Zebra English, 51 Talk, Ji Li Gua La, VIPKID, baby ABC, etc.

During this research, the author mainly adapts three methods: observational methods, literature research, and comparative methods. Firstly, the author studied the related research achievements from CNKI, and found that there were a lot of researches about the kids’ English teaching, especially the differences between classroom English lessons given by foreign teachers and that by Chinese teachers. But few of them are about online English lessons. By observing and analyzing the monolingual and bilingual English online lessons, the author found some differences between the two lessons as follows:

The Findings of This Comparative Study

According to 3P teaching methodology, teaching process can be widely divided into three procedures: preparation, presentation, and practice. While in kids’ English teaching, there is no clear cut among the three procedures, and presentation is closely related with the practice. And the author will firstly talk about the differences between monolingual online English lessons and bilingual online English lesson in the three procedures: lead-in, in enabling, and in conclusion.

The Comparative Study of Teaching Procedures

The Differences in Lead-in. There are big differences for lead-in, as we can see from Table 1, English songs and greetings are used very often in the process of lead-in, monolingual English lessons prefer to uses songs to begin a class, and bilingual English lessons use greetings more. Revision is a way more popular for bilingual lessons, because Chinese teachers pay more attention to the knowledge of the language while English
teachers pay more attention to the situations, where we can use the sentences properly. Stories for lead-in are also quite often in monolingual lessons, but bilingual lessons tend to have more suspense than monolingual lessons. Because with the help of Chinese teacher, students can get the meaning of suspense while in monolingual lessons, too much suspense can make the lessons difficult to understand, especially for kids. From Table 1, we can easily know that teachers can adopt different ways to lead in a new lesson, and it is quite common to use more than two methods to start a lesson.

Table 1
*Ways to Lead-in*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ways to Lead-in</th>
<th>Songs</th>
<th>Greetings</th>
<th>Stories</th>
<th>Suspense</th>
<th>Revision</th>
<th>Situations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bilingual English lessons</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monolingual English lessons</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**The Differences in Enabling.** Enabling, which involves teaching English words and sentences in an easy and interesting way, is the most important procedure for kids’ English teaching. In this part, the author mainly focuses on the teaching methods when observing and analyzing the 40 samples.

Bilingual English lessons are greatly different when comes to the teaching methods. As we can see from Table 2, both lessons adopt several teaching methods in enabling, and visual aids method is the most popular teaching methods for teaching kids’ English, because it is simple, convenient, and effective, especially when teaching nouns. After that, activities approach is also used very often in the two lessons. Both Chinese teachers and foreign teachers like to organize games when teaching and practicing. There are many kinds of games used in kids’ English lessons, such as loud and quiet games, card games, opposite games, Simon says, I say you do, mine games, dice game, who is missing, etc. Teachers can choose typical games for teaching different content. Total physical response is used more by monolingual English lessons than bilingual English lessons, while demonstration and explanation method is used more by bilingual English lessons. With the help of Chinese teacher, it is possible to explain the teaching content more clearly in mother language. And for foreign teachers, they often use total physical response to enable kids to use the new words and sentences. Music teaching is popular too, and for different teaching subjects, there are plenty of songs for teaching. Teachers can also change the lyrics to meet different teaching needs, and the kids would find it easier to get, because the rhythm is same. At last, bilingual English lessons adopt multi-sensory instructional strategies and mini-play method more often than monolingual English lessons, because the principles may be a little difficult to make clear, but Chinese teachers in bilingual English lessons can make it clear for kids. From Table 2, it is easy to find that several teaching methods are used in every class, and bilingual English lessons adopt more methods than monolingual English lessons.

Table 2
*Teaching Methods in Enabling*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teaching Methods</th>
<th>Total physical response</th>
<th>Activities approach</th>
<th>Music teaching</th>
<th>Multi-sensory instructional strategy</th>
<th>Mini-play method</th>
<th>Demonstration and explanation</th>
<th>Visual aids method</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bilingual English lessons</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monolingual English lessons</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The differences in conclusion. There are also some differences in conclusion, and the differences here are not so big as that in enabling. As showed in Tables 3, both bilingual English lessons and monolingual English lessons say farewell at the end of the lessons. Singing a song is a popular way to end the class, because it can make students to feel happy and released when finish the lessons. The biggest differences in conclusion is that bilingual English lessons like to review the lessons before putting an end to the lessons, while monolingual English lessons don’t usually do that.

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ways to Conclude</th>
<th>Revision</th>
<th>Music</th>
<th>Farewell</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bilingual English lessons</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monolingual English lessons</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Besides the differences in the three procedures, the author also found there are also some subtle differences in teaching contents, in classroom teaching expressions, teaching environments, and teaching modes.

The Comparative Study of Teaching Contents

All most, all the teaching contents for online class are closely related to daily life, which would be easily understood by students. But monolingual English lessons focus more on listening and speaking, while in bilingual English lessons, reading, listening, and speaking are all took as teaching important points. According to the second language acquisition, reading and writing should come after listening and speaking. And this is true for online English lessons.

The Comparative Study of Classroom Teaching Expressions

Both monolingual online English lessons and bilingual online English lessons like to use descriptive sentences to organize class, to teach new words, expressions, and sentences, and to interact with students. But body languages and facial expressions are more vividly used in monolingual online English lessons. The reasons are not difficult to see. Body language and facial expression can help monolingual English teachers better understood by their students.

The Comparative Study of Teaching Environment

With the help of advanced animation technology and multimedia, the teaching environment in online teaching is generally better than that in classroom teaching. But for some quick students, animation maybe childish, and real situation would be better for their understanding and connecting with the real life. Real situations can also play a good foundation for students to use what they learn into their daily life. The 40 samples tell that monolingual online English lessons are tent to create real situations in their teaching.

The Comparative Study of Teaching Modes

The teaching mode for online lessons is almost fixed, especially for recorded lessons. For live class, the teaching modes are more flexible. And teaching modes are more flexible in monolingual online English lessons than bilingual online English lessons. Fixed modes can be easier for students, but they have disadvantages. For example, students may ignore the directions when answering the questions, which would form a bad habit of careless in the long run. Besides, students tent not to be concentrated in class, which is also bad for students learning habit. Therefore, it is good to adopt flexible teaching modes in online English teaching.
Some Suggestions for Online English Lessons

Enhance the Communication Among Kids

English is used for communication, not only between teachers and students, but also among students. Both bilingual online English lessons and monolingual online English lessons only involve the communication between teachers and students, which is not enough. Here, the author hopes to see there will be a lot of opportunities for students to communicate online with their peers. And different kinds of online communication activities, such as online English corner, WebMeet, and etc. can be held and opened to different groups of students to enable students to communicate with their peers.

The Teaching Topics Should Be Selected Carefully

As mentioned above, the topics for online English lessons are related to daily life and students can easily get what they learn. But what to teach and when to teach still haven’t be made clear. There are many serial books for English teaching; some of them start from phonetics, some start from daily topic, some start from short stories, etc. Kids of different ages should firstly use what kind of books? There are no criteria and no related standards, and it is quiet common that different institutions have different criteria and standards. From a macro perspective, it seems that the teaching content is be in a sort of jumble without any plan, which may waste much time of English learners. During the research, the author found that different public schools in the same city may even use different books for students of the same age, which is not good for students. If teaching contents are selected and planed carefully for kids of different ages, students can learn better, quicker, and easier. The criteria and standards may vary from place to place. So, the author calls for local teaching standards for kids of different ages. The local education administrator should make a proper syllabus for local kids’ English teaching. And online English teachers should teach the kids according to the local syllabus.

Chinese Traditions and Cultures Should Be Involved

With the immersion of western cultural, western traditions, and cultures are frequently taught in English lessons. It is good for students to learn about the foreign traditions and cultures. Among the 40 samples, almost no Chinese traditions or cultures are involved in the teaching, which is not conformed to the requirements of telling Chinese stories. With the development of China, we need to introduce Chinese traditions and cultures to foreign countries when communicating with foreigners. So, it is a must to involve Chinese traditions and cultures in English lessons. And online English lessons, especially bilingual English lessons, should take Chinese traditions and cultures into teaching, which is a good way to enable students to pass and spread Chinese traditions and cultures, and a good way to build students’ confidence in Chinese cultures.

Focus on Proper Skills at Different Stages

For kids who are zero-based students, the most important skills are listening. With enough input, then teachers need to involve listening and speaking in class. And after some time, reading would also be an important skill for them. And writing comes after reading. There must be a process, not to ask the students to read at the very first beginning. When to add reading in class depends on students learning ability and learning requirements. If teachers don’t follow a certain rule, and focus on reading at the first beginning, the students will have a bad pronunciation and tones when reading and speaking English. And if teachers focus on listening and speaking without reading for too long, it will inhibit students’ learning process and make them worried about their English learning.
Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic and the “double reduction policy” of easing the burden of excessive homework and off-campus tutoring for students undergoing compulsory education make online English lessons hot.

From this comparative research, we know that bilingual English lessons and monolingual English lessons adopt different ways in lead-in, in enabling, and in conclusion, which can make the online English lessons flexible and interesting. In enabling, bilingual English lessons adopt more teaching methods than monolingual English lessons, especially when it comes to multi-sensory instructional strategy, mini-play methods, and demonstration and explanation. Besides, revision is used more often in bilingual English lessons. The two points can ensure the teaching efficiency of bilingual English lessons. But the Chinese teachers need to have authentic spoken English to develop students’ pronunciation and intonation. During the research, the author also finds there are some subtle differences in teaching contents, classroom teaching expressions, teaching environments, and teaching modes in monolingual online English lessons and bilingual online English lessons.

With modern technologies, online lessons can be vivid and interesting. But there should be online communication opportunities to enable students to communicate with peers. Besides, online English lessons need to follow the local English teaching syllabus, which can make online teaching in accordance with school teaching. In addition, Chinese traditions and cultures need to be covered in online English teaching, so as to enable students to pass and spread Chinese traditions and culture. At last, online English lessons need also to focus on proper skills at different stages, reading and writing need to come after listening and speaking for English starters.

References

