

# Research Proposal for Dissertation EDPZ6720

Dissertation Title: E-learning Solution for Weekend Face-to-face ESL (English as a Second Language) Course for Preschoolers: a Perspective of Parental Involvement in Children's Learning

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## **Brief Description of Proposed Research Topic**

The project aims to investigate the impact of parents' involvement on their pre-school children's achievement in a weekend English class. In a four-week period, four groups of preschool students who are attending or going to attend a weekend ESL course will participate in the project. All of their parents will be given instructions on how to help their children to practice the vocabularies learned at the class. In addition, half of the parents will also have access to an online discussion forum where they can interact with the teachers and other parents (experimental group). At the end of the four-week experimental period, all the children will be evaluated by their teachers for the mastery of the content learned, and their parents will complete a questionnaire. The teachers will also be interviewed. Then the researcher will analyse the data collected and conclude whether the proposed e-learning solution works or not.

## **Context and Significance**

Linguaphone Group's agent in China is renovating and localizing their original text books and instructional design from the head office in UK. In particular, they would like to develop a better solution for kids' ESL course. This is because they found that the original instructional materials might be too difficult for preschool students. They plan to not only modify the content of the course, but also integrate an e-learning solution into the course system.

This research project will play an important role in the course development process as they need a proven effective e-learning practical model and a theoretical framework to support further instructional design.

It also contributes to the academic exploration in web-enhanced instruction and parents involved learning. On the one hand, traditional weekend training courses are usually interrupted because students lack resources to continue participating in the learning process during weekdays. On the other, in terms of courses for kids, parents lack resources to help their children with their learning, provided that the course providers do not have their students' parents involved through an effective and appropriate approach. This research project is supposed to provide either a model of a successful e-learning solution to this kind of course or an insignificantly effective way that may be considered to avoid or to further modify for the intended outcomes.

## **Relevant Background Literature**

The foundation for this research project is the proven conclusion that effective parental involvement in general has positive effects on children's educational outcomes (Chavkin, 1993; Eccles & Harold, 1993; Epstein, 1994; Hobbs et al., 1984). In terms of language skills, parent-child engagement in literacy activities have been found to be associated with children's literacy and language skills (Burgess, Hecht, & Lonigan, 2002). Additional research has emphasized the importance of parent's beliefs about their role in their children's literacy and

language abilities (DeBaryshe, 1995; Sonnenschein, Baker, Serpell, & Schmidt, 2000). But why do parents involve in their children's education and their language developing process? The variables that influence their decision include their personal construction of the parental role, their personal sense of efficacy for helping children succeed in school and the general invitations, demands, and opportunities for parental involvement presented by both the child and the child's school (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995, 1997). As a result, to increase parental involvement and extend benefits it offers, we should give efforts on these factors.

In order to increase the quality of parental involvement, especially for the situation that there are 5 days' gap between every two training sections during the week, we should build a web-based communicative framework for teachers, students and parents within the training program. Previous research shows that computer-mediated communication in second and foreign language learning helps create a non-threatening environment where students tend to be more confident to take more risks and trials (Gong, 2002; Kataoka, 2000; Ramzan & Saito, 1998), while another research also points out that those who perceive themselves as less competent in the target language tend to less participate in the online activities within the course (Ng, Yeung, & Hon, 2006). So we try to utilize the resource of parents to help children build up their confidence in the language learning.

Furthermore, blending of online learning with classroom sessions offers the potential to use a virtual learning environment to support learners and target "at risk" learners quickly so that teachers can modify the course pertinently and accordingly (Hughes, 2007). Moodle, a widely recognized and used open source course management system, can easily support blended learning. It has been empirically proven to improve and enhance student performance by promoting and organizing communication among parents, students, teachers, administrators and the community (Perkins & Pfaffman, 2006).

Besides those literatures in relation to parent-involved learning, CALL (computer-assisted language learning) and course management system, this research may also refer to relevant principles and theories of instructional design, developmental psychology, TESOL (teaching English to speakers of other language), CSCL (computer-supported collaborative learning), ICT (information and communication technologies), etc.

## **Research Questions and Hypotheses**

In this research, the researcher hypothesizes that weekday online instructional activities for weekend ESL course students (preschoolers) and their parents may result in better learning outcomes. In particular, the following research questions will be explored based on a comparative experiment:

- Is there any significant difference in the learning achievement between the experimental group and control group?

- Is there any significant difference in the learning motivation and attitude towards English learning between the experimental group and control group?
- Does the e-learning solution significantly improve the communication among parents, students and teachers?
- Does the e-learning solution help parents better participate in their children's English learning? What do the parents think of the participating process?
- Does the e-learning solution help teachers analyze their learners and conduct the whole course?
- Do the teachers feel confident in managing their course under the blended learning framework?
- Are the teachers willing to participate in the development of the e-learning solution for their course in the future?

## Methodology

The methodology for this research includes comparative experiment, observation, survey, interview and literature review:

- In the comparative experiment, four classes of Linguaphone Consulting (Guangzhou) Co. Ltd. Kids Centre will be divided into experimental group and comparative group. Students from experimental group will participate in online interactive activities during weekdays while the control group's homework will be in print. The content the students learn will be basically the same but the delivery mode different. After four weeks, all involved students will have an assessment, which will indicate the learning outcome.
- During the four week experimental period, the researcher will observe all the activities in the course management system, focusing on the students' and parents' response to the online activities, especially the dialogue of synchronous and asynchronous among teachers, students and parents.
- After the experiment, the researcher will conduct the surveys to explore all participants' perceptions towards the educational technological change, the students' learning motivation, the parental involvement in children's learning, the communication quality and quantity among the three parties, etc.
- The researcher will review relevant literature before and after the experiment, which guide the experiment design and the result analysis.

## Timetable

Date	Task	Subtask	
18 Feb ~ 29 Feb	Preparation for Comparative Experiment	By 18 Feb	Complete research proposal and send it to involved teachers.
		By 19 Feb	Submit research proposal to the Faculty and discuss the proposal with supervisor.
		By 24 Feb	Modify the proposal and complete the design of online activities and in-print homework for the comparative experiment and have involved teachers' consensus.
		By 29 Feb	Prepare the content in Moodle and introduce the research to the experimental group's parents.
1 Mar ~ 30 Mar	Observation	1 ~ 30 Mar	Observe the online activities within the experimental group and record any issues or events worthwhile to explore further.
1 Mar ~ 6 Apr	Assessment and survey	By 16 Mar	Complete the assessment and survey design and send them to teachers and supervisor to review
		By 23 Mar	Complete the final edition of assessment and survey.
		29 ~30 Mar	Process the assessment and the survey; leave the open-question-based survey to parents to complete at home.
		By 6 Apr	Parents submit the survey completed at home.
7 Apr ~ 16 Apr	Interview	By 9 Apr	Complete interview design based on the brief analysis of the result of assessment and survey.
		By 16 Apr	Interview with some of the involved parents, students and teachers.
17 Apr ~ 30 Apr	Literature review	By 30 Apr	Review relevant literature and determine the method of data treatment.
1 May ~ 15 May	1 <sup>st</sup> draft of dissertation	By 7 May	Complete the structure of dissertation and discuss it with supervisor for modification.
		By 15 May	Complete the 1 <sup>st</sup> draft of dissertation and send it to supervisor to review.
16 May ~ 30 May	2 <sup>nd</sup> draft of dissertation	By 30 May	Complete the 2 <sup>nd</sup> draft of dissertation and send it to supervisor and Linguaphone to review.
1 Jun ~ 8 Jun	Submission of dissertation	By 8 Jun	Complete the final edition of dissertation, submit it and send a copy to Linguaphone.
9 Jun ~ 30 Jun	Research result review	By 30 Jun	Linguaphone feedback on the research and discuss any further cooperation; conduct a second assessment at the end of the Linguaphone semester if necessary.
		By 30 Jun	Examiners assigned by the Faculty review the dissertation; a copy will be sent to Linguaphone as well.

## Limitations and Anticipated Problems

Time constraints of the semester require less time than may be ideal for this study. The students and parents may have not adapted themselves to the blended learning in the four weeks before the assessment and survey, which may decrease the reliability of the data collected. On the other hand, because this is a technological change within the educational organization, some issues, such as low efficiency of carrying out the proposed online activities and technical problems, may interrupt and influence the experiment. In this case, the researcher will think of extending the experiment period to six weeks.

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