

A comparative study of mothers' beliefs on early English education between ESL and EFL contexts

영어조기교육에 대한 한국과 미국 거주 어머니의 신념 비교연구

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Abstract

본 연구는 질적 연구방법을 통해 한국 어머니들의 영어조기교육에 관한 신념을 분석하며, EFL 환경과 ESL 환경에 있는 어머니들의 영어조기교육에 관한 신념이 어떻게 다른지 분석함으로써 영어조기교육에 관한 어머니의 신념이 환경에 따라 어떠한 차이를 보이는지 비교하고자 한다. 영어를 제2언어로 사용하는 영어권 나라에 거주하는 한국 어머니와 한국에 거주하는 어머니의 신념을 비교하기 위해 미국과 한국에서 인구학적 배경이 비슷한 16명의 어머니를 선정하여 인터뷰하였다. 이들과의 인터뷰를 통해 각기 다른 환경에 거주하고 있는 두 그룹의 어머니들이 가지고 있는 영어조기교육에 관한 신념을 영어교육에 대한 동기, 교육방법, 제2외국어 습득을 중심으로 비교 분석하였다. 대체로 본 연구에 참여한 어머니들은 거주 지역에 상관없이 영어조기교육에 대해 긍정적 신념을 가지고 있었지만 교육시기에 대해서는 각기 다른 의견을 보였고, 영어교육의 목적은 학업적인 성취보다는 세계화된 시대를 살기 위한 기본적인 의사소통 기술의 습득이라는 신념을 보였다. 반면, 한국에 거주하는 어머니들은 미국에 거주하는 어머니들에 비해서 가정에서 직접 자녀에게 영어를 가르치고자 하는 의지가 강했고, 미국에 거주하는 어머니들은 한국 거주 어머니들에 비해 문해 교육에 대한 관심도가 높고 실제적인 지도를 많이 행하고 있었다.

주제어 : 영어조기교육, 어머니의 신념, 질적 연구

I. Introduction

Achieving fluency in English seems to be as important as achieving fluency in Korean for young children, since Korean parents believe that a positive relationship exists between early exposure to the second language and acquisition. Furthermore, English is one of the most important subjects, along with math and Korean language arts, from the elementary-school level all the way up to the college entrance exam. In 1995, the inclusion of English in the elementary curriculum from the third grade on was legislated, and English has been included in the elementary-school curriculum since 1997. Therefore, English education in Korea is directly associated with academic achievement

in elementary school, and the issue has drawn much attention from parents in the last six years. A primary purpose of very early education and extracurricular activities in Korea is academic preparation (Lee, Chang, Chung, & Hong, 2002). As a consequence, the legislation has influenced younger children as well as school-age children (Lee, 1997).

Korean parents in the United States are also concerned about their children's proficiency in English. One of reasons for recent Korean immigration is the education of the next generation. Korean parents often come to the United States in hopes of providing a better educational environment for their children (Park, 1999). The acquisition of English is the first step in achieving this goal of immigration since proficiency in English is considered as an important factor in

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academic achievement. Immigrant parents strongly believe in the connection between students' academic success and proficiency in English. It has been established that English-language proficiency and academic achievement are related (Nord & Griffin, 1999), and this connection is widely accepted by immigrant parents who want their children to be included in mainstream American culture. In their qualitative study, Orellana, Ek, and Hernandez (2000) studied immigrant parents' notions of children's English-language skill as a indicator of academic progress. Some parents who participated in the study expressed concern about their children's academic success if they enrolled them in a bilingual education program, regarding it as a cause of academic deterioration.

The goal of English as a Second Language (ESL) programs in the United States is to help immigrant children achieve full proficiency in English, and the process is transitional. Bilingual education programs in the United States are usually (1) submersion programs, which do not offer instruction in the children's native language, mainly due to a lack of resources, (2) bilingual programs which provide native-language instruction until children have adequate skills in the second language, or (3) two-way bilingual education, which provides bilingual instruction to both immigrant children and non-immigrant children (McCaleb, 1997). The goal of submersion and immersion programs is fluency in English, while two-way bilingual programs aim to achieve fluency in both languages. Immersion programs are the most common elementary-school programs for children from different language backgrounds.

In the ESL context of the United States, the influence of parental beliefs and behaviors for children's proper language development in the first, as well as in the second language, should not be underestimated. Parental attitudes towards bilingual education are important to immigrant children's second-language acquisition. How parents negotiate two languages and cultures has a significant influence on children's bilingual ability (Li, 1999). There is a clear relationship between parents' attitudes towards their heritage culture and towards American culture and

children's bilingual language acquisition (Li, 1999; Shin & Kim, 1998; Young & Tran, 1999). Li's study (1999) discusses her own experience as a parent and identifies the importance of a positive attitude toward both languages and cultures in children's bilingual education.

Since parents' beliefs presumably have a direct influence on their behaviors, how parents perceive the process of second-language learning in children should be examined in order to comprehend and possibly to intervene in parents' decisions concerning English education. By examining maternal beliefs regarding English education in two cultural community contexts, the research will evaluate the phenomenon of hot-housing, would seem to exist, how it is expressed and how it is justified. The main goal of this study is to make a thick description of Korean mothers' beliefs and reported practices concerning early English education across two cultural community contexts (ESL versus EFL), and the first hypothesis is that there are differences between maternal beliefs in ESL contexts and maternal beliefs in EFL contexts.

A better understanding of the relationship between children's ecological context and their development continues to be important (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). There is an increasing interest in the relationship between families' sociocultural context and children's development (Korat & Levin, 2001). Indeed, the intimate connections between parental beliefs and behaviors have been acknowledged as important and have been studied because parental beliefs influence parental behaviors relevant to children's development (Harkness & Super, 1992).

Ethnotheories focus on explaining how child development is culturally shaped (Harkness & Super, 1992). Ethnotheories present a theoretical framework, a "developmental niche," to study the cultural regulation of the child's micro-environment (Harkness & Super, 1986). Whereas developmental psychology has been interested in the "decontextualized," "universal" child, the developmental niche is a framework for examining the cultural structuring of child development by conceptualizing at the interface of child and culture (Harkness & Super, 1986).

The developmental niche consists of three

components: (1) the physical and social settings in which the child lives; (2) culturally regulated customs of child care and child rearing; and (3) the psychology of the caretakers (Harkness & Super, 1992; Harkness & Super, 1999). And the customs of child care and child rearing are adapted by parents and caretakers from the ecological and cultural settings in which they live (Harkness & Super, 1986). The psychology of the caretakers includes parents' cultural belief systems (or parental ethnotheories) of child behavior, as well as customs from the cultural settings in which they live (Harkness & Super, 1986). Parents' cultural belief systems, or parental ethnotheories, are one component of the developmental niche, and Harkness and Super (1999) have focused on how parents' cultural belief systems are represented in the organization of their children's daily experiences. For example, they argue that a key to successful literacy intervention is understanding the role of parents' cultural belief systems and their relationships to behavior.

A socio-cultural perspective also provides an intriguing way to explain children's development and learning. Heath (1983) stresses that language is learned through socialization in the community to which a child belongs. Indeed, "Human learning presupposes a specific social nature and a process by which children grow into the intellectual life of those around them" (Vygotsky, 1978).

In this study Korean mothers' beliefs in different cultural community contexts are examined with developmental niche and parental ethnotheories providing two conceptual tools by which to explicate the findings in relation to contextual factors of their social group. Adopting these tools and this approach accords with the social cultural perspective on child socialization, education, and development. The main purpose of this study is to describe maternal beliefs based on their narratives concerning a recent controversial educational issue in Korea, young children's early English education and compare beliefs of mothers in ESL context to beliefs of mothers in EFL context. Describing and discussing Korean mothers' beliefs and practices in early English education according to the contexts is the main objective of this study. Why do mothers' believe what they believe

about early English education? What underlying values do they suggest?

II. Research Methods

1. Participants

The participants in this study are Korean mothers with preschool- or kindergarten-aged children in Korea and the United States. To compare the beliefs and practices of mothers regarding early English education in different contexts, the researcher purposely recruited mothers with similar educational backgrounds, occupations, number of the children, and ages of the children. Participants have been selected based on the following criteria: (1) they must be highly educated mothers with at least a bachelor's degree; (2) their spouses should be working in white-collar occupations (3) they are mothers without a full-time job; and (4) they should be mothers with one or two 3-6 years old children. Furthermore, the Korean language should be the mother tongue of their children. According to Lee et al. (2002), mothers' perceptions of very early Education were related with their occupations. Mothers without a full-time job were likely to have more positive beliefs concerning very early education. In the study, to better describe the hot-housing effect, the participants are highly educated mothers who can afford very early English education for their children and who do not have full-time jobs. The mean age of mothers was 33.2 and the mothers averaged 1.6 children without a full-time job.

2. Procedures

To find participants who satisfied the criteria, the researcher contacted kindergarten directors located in Bundang and Suwon. The directors who permitted the researcher to interview parents of children in their schools asked mothers individually whether they wanted to participate in the study by explaining the purpose of the study. Then, the directors provided the

phone numbers of the volunteer mothers to the researcher. The researcher contacted these mothers individually to arrange the meeting time. Based on the criteria, 8 mothers were recruited and interviewed. In the United States, the researcher found participants through the Korean community based on the criteria above. 8 mothers in the local area of Pennsylvania were recruited and interviewed.

The interview questionnaire was designed before the interviews, even though new questions were included as needed. The structured interview questions dealt with (1) the importance of early English education, (2) the relative importance of early English education as a subject in the school curriculum, (3) the use of educational materials, (4) parents' reinforcement and reward structures, (5) interactions between parents and their children in relation to early English education at home, (6) context of English education, and (7) efforts and aptitude in early English learning.

The interviews were semi-structured so that the researcher could add new questions whenever they were needed during the conversation with each mother. From these semi-structured interviews, the researcher was able to obtain information to compare mothers' beliefs with respect to early English education. The interview strategy was standardized and open-ended, so the same series of questions was asked to all the mothers, in a similar order.

Individual mothers were interviewed and their narratives recorded with audio equipment and then transcribed. The meeting places were decided according to the mothers' preferences. Most often, the researcher met with the mothers in their homes, because they preferred this. Other times, the researcher met with two mothers in a cafeteria in the United States.

3. Data Analysis

For the analysis of the interview data, the audio-taped narratives were transcribed and translated into English, since they had been conducted in Korean. The following were main procedures for the analysis of the interview data. It started with the first interview in the United States. The researcher read and analyzed

the transcripts, and significant statements were extracted and clustered into themes. To describe the essence of Korean mothers' experiences, narrative descriptions were quoted. For increasing credibility of the study, member checking was conducted by two participants (Lee & Kim, 1998). They evaluated the results by reading the raw data transcripts and coded data. They evaluated how the analysis process was done.

III. Parents' Narratives

1. What do mothers believe concerning Early English Education?

Whether they live in an ESL context or an EFL context, most mothers support early English education. In this study, they exhibit strong beliefs concerning early English education and they addressed the benefits of learning a second language in the early years. Only one mother in Korea is against early English education. Mrs. Min addressed her negative beliefs about early English education or about the overall importance of early English education. She is distinguishable from the other mothers in Korea by her less strong beliefs concerning early English education.

Actually, I don't like early English education when children don't speak the Korean language perfectly. If a mother is a fluent speaker of English, a child can accept it as their language. But, usually, Korean mothers are not. Speaking Korean at home and learning English only in institutions do not help a child learn English. Now, my child is learning English in kindergarten for fun. I want to start teaching English actively from the beginning of elementary school from second grade with native teachers (K, Mrs. Min).

The debate about the appropriate time to start English education is still ongoing, despite these mothers' positive beliefs concerning early English learning. Some mothers think that earlier is better, but some think that a certain age is appropriate for

learning a second language. The debate is related to beliefs about second-language acquisition: whether two languages can be developed at the same time or not. Mothers who oppose very early English learning, think that the Korean language should be learned before the second language. On the other hand, some mothers believe in children's ability to develop two languages at the same time. Mothers in Korea are more likely to believe that two languages can be developed at the same time. Mothers' beliefs about early exposure to the second language and second language development are influenced by the ecological environment which they are in.

There is a discrepancy between mothers in Korea and mothers in the United States about early English learning, the mothers in Korea showed more positive attitudes toward early exposure to English than mothers in the United States. Mothers in the United States want their children to learn the Korean language before attending preschool. These mothers think it is possible that their children will lose their Korean-language proficiency once they start school and begin to play with their peers in English. They do not object to early English education but they are worried about their children learning Korean. They are uncertain about the appropriate timing of early exposure to a second language, despite their strong beliefs concerning the overall importance of English-language learning. They have a hidden belief about early second language acquisition without losing the first language proficiency. The majority of mothers in the United States mentioned their concern about losing Korean-language proficiency.

Once children enter preschool or play with peers, they don't want to use Korean because English is the language that is accepted by this society. I didn't teach English much because I want her to learn English after she first speaks Korean fluently (U, Mrs. Kim 1).

However, most mothers in Korea believe that two languages could be developed at the same time and that children could accept both languages. Unlike the majority of mothers in the United States who consider children's Korean-language acquisition as a priority or

did not have strong beliefs about early exposure to English, the majority of mothers in Korea had strong beliefs concerning children's early exposure to English, except for a few mothers. So, English education can be started as early as math or Korean literacy in Korea based on mothers' positive beliefs about early second language acquisition.

It is okay to teach English once children learn the Korean language. About two years old. I don't mean teaching only English. What I mean is teaching English while mothers teach Korean at the same time (K, Mrs. Kwon).

I don't know exactly but I heard that children can speak English as much as speak Korean later, if they learn English just like they learn Korean in the early years. So I want to teach English as early as I can. But I cannot teach English as much as I can teach Korean, due to my proficiency (K, Mrs. Kim 2).

Despite mothers' different opinions about the simultaneous acquisition of a second language with the mother tongue and about the appropriate timing of second-language learning, most mothers showed positive attitudes toward early English education for their young children. In fact, the researcher did not find one mother who did not teach English at home. Even the mother who opposed early English education exposed her children to foreign films at home and had them attend extra-curricular activities to learn English. Consequently, all the children in this study were learning English before attending to kindergarten. The mothers addressed their four most important reasons for early English education: the enjoyment of learning a second language, achieving native-like pronunciation, increasing familiarity with foreigners, and increasing understanding of other cultures.

Most of all, the mothers in Korea viewed learning through enjoyment as an important benefit of early English education. Before learning English as part of their elementary-school curriculum, children can have the experience of learning English through play, without academic pressure.

I think learning through play is important for children. Without this approach, it is possible to show negative responses to learning English in elementary school. If my child learns English through play, which

my child likes, she will not have negative experiences and she will accept learning as an extension of play (K, Mrs. Park).

Since children in Korea live separately from the foreign-language context, mothers in Korea try to provide opportunities for achieving native-like proficiency through early English education. They believe that children can mimic native speakers' pronunciation as it is and attain English proficiency more easily than older children.

At first, younger children have less denial of another language. Well...familiarity. They just accept it as another language. A language that they have to learn. And younger children have better pronunciation. They seem to have more sense in learning a language (K, Mrs. Shin).

Another important reason that parents support early English education is to provide familiarity with foreigners. By providing chances to meet foreigners, mothers expect their children to be familiar with people from a different culture and language and to have confidence in talking with foreigners.

Since our generation learned English from Junior high school, there is a gap between academic learning and practical use. Since I am teaching my child English from his early years, he is comfortable with foreigners (K, Mrs. Kim 4).

I didn't teach my first child English when he was young. When we first came to the United States, he was seven years old and he couldn't understand English at all. He didn't even know the alphabet. So, he had a hard time. Unlike him, my second child is learning English naturally, without stress. She is not afraid of meeting foreigners. She just accepts everybody is just same human being (U, Mrs. Park).

It is clear that even preschoolers not only identify human differences but also develop group-referenced identities, early perceptions of human differences, and interpersonal skills (Ramsey, 1987). The mothers both in Korea and in the United States identify the importance of children's early perception about ethnics and want their children to accept ethnic differences naturally. Besides ethnic differences, mothers try to

teach cultural differences through English learning. They hope to prepare their children to encounter a new culture in the future by teaching them English. This is one of the important goals of teaching English to young children, since they seem to believe that their children will live in a more global society than they do. The mothers in Korea frequently mentioned the culture shock and cultural gaps that their children might experience.

2. English as Competence

Korean mothers' strong beliefs regarding early English education are beyond doubt. Teaching English in the early years is as common as teaching math or Korean literacy. One mother in Korea answered, "Asking whether or not early English education is important is a silly question because there is no question about that" (K, Mrs. Kim 3). One of the reasons for their strong beliefs comes from the values that they place on English. Because they consider English-language ability to be an important skill for their children's future, as much as the Korean language, English is important for their children's education not as an academics but as a competitive skill in the globalized society.

Mothers in the United States and in Korea perceive English-language ability as a source of competitive power or competence for their children's future careers. Once children acquire native-like English-language proficiency, their mothers expect that they will achieve competitive power and advance in the job market in Korea as well as in the United States. Their ultimate goal in teaching English to their children is to provide an important skill for their future careers.

Young and Tran (1999) report that over 90 % of Vietnamese parents agree with the following statements: (a) High levels of bilingualism can lead to practical, career related advantages, and (b) high levels of bilingualism can result in superior cognitive development (p. 229). Accordingly, most Vietnamese parents believe that bilingual ability will have a positive effect on their children's future careers as well as on their cognitive development. Korean parents

showed a similar pattern in a study by Shin and Kim (1998), supporting bilingual education as offering practical, career-related advantages and as a factor in superior cognitive development.

In this study, the mothers in both contexts also believe that their children will have more career opportunities with bilingual ability and more opportunities in life by communicating with diverse people.

As you know, communication with diverse people expands the mind and thinking. So, it is important to speak the official language that is used in all parts of the world if we don't live only in Korea and if we want to live in a world. In academics or in business, speaking English is important (K, Mrs. Kim 1).

As we experienced, people with and without English language ability had different career chances. It will be more competitive for our children's generation. Speaking English provides more opportunities and confidence. If we speak English fluently, we can be confident in talking with anybody. For a career or for studying or for reading books, people with and without English language ability will have more discrepancies (U, Mrs. Kim 1).

Mothers in Korea suppose that their children will use English in their daily lives in the future. Accordingly, even though mothers' expectation varied, all expect their children to achieve at least a level of proficiency at which they can represent their opinions without difficulty in various contexts. Mothers in the ESL context and mothers in the EFL context have common expectations. Some mothers in Korea also mentioned their expectation that their children would be perfectly bilingual, eventually.

I want my son to speak English as well as he speaks Korean. I have a plan to send him to the United States to study when he is grown up, and I hope that he will study and learn the culture without attending a language course (K, Mrs. Kim 2).

Besides attaining competence for future careers, some mothers in Korea think that learning English would help their children learn about Western culture just in case they studying or live abroad.

My daughter doesn't start learning English early... I don't think it is too early (she is three years old). There is culture shock and trouble when one encounters a new culture. If she learns customs in her early years, she will accept the differences and she won't experience contradictions (K, Mrs. Kim 3).

Mothers' objectives in teaching English to their children are very practical, focusing on communication skills. Mothers in ESL and EFL contexts want their children to learn English to acquire better communication skills for daily contexts. Since the mothers' educational experiences related to English had been focused on grammar and reading to prepare for the college entrance examination, they do not want their children to have the same experience. Korean mothers do not view the English education that they received for six years as a success, in terms of achieving communication skills. Their past educational experiences have influenced on their educational decisions for their children.

If we provide a chance to learn English in the early years, my child will not have trial and error like us. We spend a lot of time learning English and we cannot speak well. Based on my experience, it was not the right way to learn English (U, Mrs. Park).

The mothers accept English as an official language of the world, so achieving proficiency in English seems to be a prerequisite for living as a global citizen. However, some mothers think that the powerful language could change to Chinese in the future.

Nowadays, English is the most important means of competition. As time goes on, isn't it possible that something else will be? For example, Chinese (U, Mrs. Kim 2).

One mother in Korea, who had a bachelor's degree in Chinese Literature, expressed her wish to teach Chinese as a third language. If Chinese is the most accepted language, Korean mothers will teach Chinese for their children's future. Their enthusiastic attitude comes from the strong value that they place on education and their recognition of the global society. They are aware of the importance of learning English

in daily life, even to use the Internet. In addition, from their own experiences in relation to English education, Korean mothers' beliefs concerning the practical use of language are strong. Regardless of their future residency in the United States, they conceive of bilingual ability as an important quality in a global society.

3. Teaching own child by themselves

Mothers have different perspectives on teaching English at home according to the context which they are in. Though mothers in both contexts have similar patterns of practices regarding English education at home, such as watching films and reading books, their perspectives on teaching their children themselves differ according to whether they believe that they can help their children improve their English proficiency. Some of the mothers in the United States think that their poor English pronunciation might not help their children learn English, as it might confuse them. In addition, some mothers in the United States and one mother in Korea place a priority on achieving Korean-language proficiency. These mothers think that their children are learning enough English at school they could only help with homework or reading books.

There are two types of mothers who do not show strong beliefs about early exposure to English at home. One group of mothers do not have strong beliefs about early exposure to English at home because they place a priority on teaching the Korean language to their young children before they go to school in the United States. On the other hand, some mothers in the United States do not have strong beliefs about early exposure since they do not have strong beliefs concerning the overall importance of English learning for their children.

I heard from a teacher not to teach English at home. I also do not want to confuse Yoon-A because I want her to learn Korean first (U, Mrs. Kim 1).

No mothers in Korea, except for the one, consider their practices in English at home to be an obstacle to

achieve proficiency in Korean or in English. Mrs. Min, who expressed a negative opinion about English teaching by mothers, mentioned that teaching English at home is not much help for children's acquisition since Korean mothers usually are not bilingual. She represents mothers who do not have strong beliefs about the overall importance of early English learning.

On the other hand, the mothers in the United States showed a preference for professional institutions or interactions with peers who speak English more than their self teaching at home. However, both the mothers in Korea and the mothers in the United States acknowledged the importance of interactions with peers who can speak English and the importance of social contexts where English is used. The influence of children's social environment was once underestimated (Lee, Park, & Kim, 2000). However, it is now accepted that language learning is a socio-cultural process (Lu, 1998). Children's language learning occurs while they are playing and interacting with others. And mothers are well aware of the socio-cultural perspective on language learning.

Even though a teacher should be present, experiences of being exposed to peer groups who speak the same foreign language is an important way to teach English in the early years. So they have to speak in the foreign language (K, Mrs. Kim 1).

Brisk (2000) argues that a close relationship exists between proficiency and the use of a language: "proficiency facilitates use and use promotes proficiency"(p. 4). Since children in EFL context live in a rich environment for learning English at school, mothers do not seem to feel as much pressure to teach them English at home. They know that their children's daily environment naturally exposes them to English, as they play with their peers and attend school in the United States. Since mothers in Korea are also well aware of this, they want to interact with their children in English at home.

I think the most effective way of learning English is in daily conversations. For example, when my daughter wakes up in the morning, she can say 'good morning.' And she says 'good night' when she

goes to bed. Before saying 'Sa-Ga,' she said 'apple'. These things (K, Mrs. Kim 3).

Mrs. Min, who is against early English education, however, introduced an alternative way of teaching English at home. She and her neighbor, another mother with young children, teach their own children by themselves once a week. Mrs. Min teaches crafts and the other mother teaches English. The mother has experience working with children in private institutions and majoring in English education in college. The mother who teaches English usually uses games, plays in English with the children, and tells stories. She calls this as 'Poom-at-I'. It is a traditional word in Korea, which means working together in agricultural communities. She views this way as a success so far without any economic cost.

Mothers had different majors in college. And teaching one's own child may cause some emotional difficulties. For example, if one's own child does something well, the mother is likely to overestimate the child's ability, or vice versa. So we gather two or three children. I teach crafts and another mother teaches English (K, Mrs. Min).

Maternal practices related to teaching English at home vary depending on children's characteristics or preferences. Usually videos, audiotapes, or television programs are used to expose children to the English language. Despite the variety of materials used, all mothers agreed with the benefits of reading children's literature for their children's English education.

I usually read books to her. I take her to the library to listen to lectures or quizzes. I've tried many things. The most sustained way is reading books (U, Mrs. Kim 2).

Watching videos or television programs such as Sesame Street is popular because it provides the chance to hear native speakers. Since these mothers do not consider themselves bilingual or native-like as English speakers, they want to provide opportunities for their children to hear and imitate native speakers' pronunciation.

Well... because I don't speak fluently in English, watching videos is very effective for learning pronunciation (U, Mrs. Lee).

Because visual materials such as videos or television programs interest children, my son watches a lot. I will decrease the time when we go back to Korea. The reason I let him watch cartoons a lot is that my child likes them and they might help in learning English, I think (U, Mrs. Park).

Some mothers in Korea reported that conversations in English or storytelling in English with their children at home were the most effective way of learning English. This is consistent with their beliefs concerning parent-child interactions in learning English and their narratives about maternal practices in teaching English at home. Mothers in Korea feel comfortable teaching English to their children and they also consider it as an effective way of learning for their children.

Making conversation in English has been effective. When my child and I sit together, I talk to him in English, for example saying "could you bring a cup?" The best way of learning English is mothers talking to their own children at home (K, Mrs. Kwon).

4. Were children born with ability of the second language acquisition?

Two mothers in the United States answered that individual differences, which occur in same educational feedback, is caused by the process of nurture at home and at school. Majority of mothers in this study think that individual differences in second-language acquisition are due to children's inborn language ability. Some mothers ascribed the differences to a combination of nature and nurture.

Individual differences depend on the opportunities that children are given to learn English, such as how much time a child is exposed to English. Whether children are exposed through parents, videos, or books determines how well they do in learning English (U, Mrs. Kim 2).

In contrast, most mothers accept differences in inborn individual ability to acquire a second language,

even though they do not relate language acquisition and overall cognitive functioning. They accept multiple intelligences. They do not think that superior ability in language acquisition necessarily reflects the overall intelligence of a child.

Teachers told my son that he made incredible progress in learning English. And it is because of reading a lot of books. I think my child has better cognitive function in liberal arts (U, Mrs. Park).

Most of all, people have different abilities. Some children do better mathematically and some do better linguistically. Comparing me with my husband, I think he is better than me in learning a language. If we have a written test, I am sure that I will receive better scores. But, he is better than me in speaking (K, Mrs. Kim 2).

However, some mothers mentioned the complexity of individual differences. They explained it as a combination of nature and nurture. Even though there is a clear difference in individual ability, these mothers think children overcome natural differences somewhat by their efforts with their parents.

Most of all, despite all the reasons, linguistic ability seems to be inborn. Then parents should help. If mothers talk to their children a lot and interact more, as observed in my child, she made a lot of progress when I made a lot of conversation with her. Parents should help a child to learn vocabulary through interactions, whether using English or Korean (U, Mrs. Won).

Discussion and Conclusion

The present study is designed to employ qualitative methodology to elaborate on the mothers' beliefs and practices through narratives. It conducted semi-structured interviews using a standardized, open-ended strategy to describe and compare mothers' beliefs in different sociocultural contexts. Similarities and differences exist in mothers' beliefs concerning early English education in different contexts. To design appropriate English learning experiences, there is some value in studying

Korean mothers' beliefs and practices at home in relation to English education.

In this study, the mothers in both contexts showed similar patterns of practices in terms of their use of visual materials. In addition, the mothers in both contexts read books to their children daily to help their children learn English, and they think this is the most effective way of teaching English. However, the mothers in Korea prefer more direct interactions with their children at home than mothers in the United States. This difference results from the social environment that they are in. In the ESL context, mothers do not have to purposely expose their children to English. Their daily life context cannot be separated from their English-language use, and mothers in the United States are well aware of that. The mothers in Korea also mentioned that they might not try to teach English if they were in an ESL context. The social context in which they live has a great influence on mothers' beliefs and attitudes toward early English education.

However, the mothers in the United States clearly perform more practices regarding literacy education. Because preschools and kindergartens in the United States start teaching literacy, mothers usually checked their children's progress by helping with homework. But mothers in Korea are more concerned with communicative skills than literacy. Therefore, mothers in the United States teach the alphabet at home more frequently than mothers in Korea.

Given the circumstances, the mothers in each context seemed to perform as best they could. Also, there is no doubt that they have strong beliefs in early English education whether they live in the foreign-language context or not. Both groups of mothers view English-language proficiency as a life skill for their children rather than just a matter of academics. To Korean mothers, mathematical knowledge is only for examinations, which end with schooling. In contrast, language learning is expected to have a long-term influence on children's future careers and lives. In addition, the mothers in Korea addressed stronger beliefs about their children's future life living in a global society than mothers in the United States.

Due to the practical expectation and beliefs by the

mothers in Korea about their children's English use in future, they want to teach English not as an academic subject but as a communication skill. The mothers in Korea focus on teaching English speaking in daily contexts while the mothers in the United States focus on teaching literacy at home. Since the mothers in Korea showed strong beliefs about their self-teaching at home, useful resources and instructional manuals should be developed for the mother-child interaction in English. More importantly, school curriculum should reflect parents' beliefs and educational needs about children's language learning by focusing on speaking and listening. If school curriculum does not include parents' beliefs and educational needs regarding early English education, English training for young children in ESL contexts will increase every year. For proper English education in early years, understanding parents' beliefs is important.

This study has a limitation to be generalized. Even though the purpose of the study is to describe and discuss Korean mothers' beliefs concerning early English education in different contexts, the data was gathered only in specific areas of Korea and the United States. Considering these geographical limitations, it may be hard to generalize the results of this study to mothers in other places.

Key Words : Early English Education, mothers' beliefs, qualitative study

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