

A Survey on English Reading Status of Left-behind Children in Rural Areas of Northern China

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Taking Suining County in Xuzhou city of Jiangsu province as the survey subject, this paper is to study the current English reading situation of the left-behind children based on a questionnaire survey of 472 respondents from 4 primary and middle schools in rural areas. The result indicated that there are serious problems in the current situation of English reading among left-behind children in rural areas, which are as follows: insufficient reading time and books, few access to having books, increased digital reading, many reading disabilities, poor reading environment, etc. This paper analyzes the reasons and gives corresponding countermeasures for society, school and family, to improve the English reading condition of rural left-behind children and to better promote their reading ability and habits. It also provides the reference for narrowing the disparity gap of reading resources services between urban and rural China.

Keywords: left-behind children in rural areas, English reading, analysis and research, socialization

Introduction

Nowadays, reading has been inseparable from our life in the promotion of nationwide reading, and English reading is an effective way for people to gain a better understanding of foreign culture and world civilization. However, in the rural areas with backward economic conditions, English reading has been a severe challenge for left-behind children, whose parents leave for big cities for a living. According to the report, China's Child Population in 2015: Facts and Figures, released by the United Nations Children's Fund, the number of left-behind children aged 0-17 in rural areas in 2015 exceeded 40 million (UNICEF, 2017). According to the 2017 education statistics released by the Ministry of Education, the number of children living with migrant workers in compulsory education and left-behind children in rural areas in 2017 was 18.9745 million and 15.5056 million

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respectively, resulting in scarcity of correct guidance of parents and reading habits, especially for English reading ability, which is closely related to their future education. Therefore, this paper focuses on the current situation of English reading of rural left-behind children, and takes Suining County in Xuzhou city, Jiangsu Province as the survey subject to investigate and study how to handle with the problems that rural left-behind children confronted with so as to meet their reading needs and enhance their reading ability.

Data Sources And Survey Methods

This paper takes Suining County in Xuzhou city as the research site to investigate left-behind children aged between 7 and 14, whose parents go out to work both or alone. A total of 600 questionnaires were sent out offline and 472 valid questionnaires were collected. The survey recovery rate was 78.6%, among which 238 male students (50.4%) and 234 female students (49.6%). After being collected, the offline questionnaires are reviewed by the research team members and put into the questionnaire platform for data statistics and analysis.

Survey Results and Analysis

The survey shows that 21.19% of left-behind children have no English books; 65.68% have less than 10 English books, among whom 22.67% never read English books, while 55.93% read 1-2 English books a month. Furthermore, it also shows that almost 69.28% borrow books from others, including their relatives, friends or classmates; only 17.97% and 8.05% borrow books from school libraries or community libraries. This shows that most children's access to English books is limited. Libraries play little role in their daily life. There are far more books in the library than left-behind children can buy or borrow, however, library, as a place with abundant books, does not gain the favor of children.

According to the survey data, 71.61% of left-behind children cannot read extra-curricular English books except their English Textbooks, 54.45% are interested in comic magazines, cartoon pictures and short stories. The biggest obstacle lies in vocabulary (71.61%), and other languages points such as sentence patterns (55.51%), and grammar (25.42%).

As to the reading purpose, 52.54% is to meet the assignments of teachers, and only 26.91% reading English extra-curricular materials for their own interests. What's more, there are 66.53% of children reading paper books, 26.06% and 58.26% reading books through computers and mobile phones. It can be seen that digital reading has impacted on the way of their reading.

Statistics also show that reading activities with companions at home or in library are not enough. 65.8% of children often read books alone at home, 16.15% read with their classmates and friends at school, 15.00% often read at bookstore, and only 3.05% read in libraries and other public places.

Reasons to the Scarcity of English Reading of Left-behind Children

Lack of Family Guidance

Family is an indispensable and important part of children's growth. It is noticeable that the family guidance of left-behind children in rural areas is mainly under their grandparents or relatives. However, their grandparents were not so well-educated, even illiterate, and have no contact with English. What they

care about are basic living guarantees, such as adequate food and drink, clothing and warmth, and personal safety. They do not care about the education and cultural literacy of left-behind children, let alone their extra curricular reading in English. Some of them even think that English is useless. Therefore, the left-behind children cannot get the support and correct spiritual guidance to read English books.

Insufficient Public Resources

The economic conditions in rural areas are not as good as those in cities that have adequate facilities. Due to the huge economic difference between countries and cities, talents prefer to teach in developed cities, leading to the shortage of teachers especially English teachers in rural areas. What's more, rural libraries also face with many problems such as insufficient book collection and slow updating. At the same time, children's reading activities are seldom carried out neither at school or in library, which makes the left-behind children hardly access to English books.

Some Suggestions to Improve Left-behind Children's English Reading Environment in Rural Areas

Firstly, improving the system of public services to change left-behind children's English reading conditions. At present, there are few original English reading materials available for left-behind children in rural areas in public libraries. Therefore, it is necessary to cooperate with public libraries in cities which have rich book resources to supply or with urban colleges and universities to share college English teachers in teaching experience and reading skills with children, so as to realize the mutual communication between urban and rural reading resources. A mobile library carried by trailer can be set up to move around the rural schools to apply services for children. What's more, volunteers from universities can provide English reading guidance for children. In addition, with the rapid development of the Internet nowadays, digital reading is particularly popular especially for villages where traffic is inconvenient and book resources are scarce, a fully-featured digital reading platform can bring great convenience to left-behind children. In these ways, all aspects of society work together to build a better public service system for left-behind children in promoting their English reading.

Secondly, stimulating children's interest in English reading with a good reading environment composed by families, teachers and social workers in village community. For left-behind children who lack parental guidance, extracurricular reading environment has a significant impact on their reading interests (Zhang, 2016). Social workers can read books together with child, and communicate and share their feelings in the process of reading to stimulate a child's imagination and appreciation ability. At the same time, they can further guide children what kind of books they should read and recommend English reading books which are suitable for their age group. In addition, with the deepening of the new curriculum reform, rural schools can carry out some reading activities such as book recommendation or book review etc. to enhance students' reading interests. Each class can set up a reading corner to encourage students to exchange their own books and share their ideas. Teachers should correctly guide students' reading behavior: classical works, poems and essays are used for intensive reading; the popular educational books are used for skimming; newspapers and magazines are used for browsing, so as to reduce the phenomenon of "low reading ability" and "ineffective reading" of left-behind children (Deng, 2014).

While reading, students can not only acquire English knowledge, but also cultivate their ability of information analysis in tempering their willpower and improving their innovation ability. For example, English newspapers and periodicals are related to politics, culture, science, life and other aspects. They can broaden students' horizons, enrich students' learning resources, and help students know current events. The children can also recommend English materials with each other, and share reading experiences through the network through this kind of continuous English reading activities.

Implications and Conclusion

The rural left-behind children are a special group in China, and their reading condition greatly influences the whole national reading level and national literacy. As same as other children, left-behind children in rural areas are the future of our country. When growing up, they will be the pillars for rural construction. It's not easy to effectively solve the dilemma of rural left-behind children, which acquires us to rationally analyze the English reading problems of rural left-behind children with great efforts from three aspects: society, school and family. Combining online and offline methods, a trinity reading service system can be constructed with social assistance and school guidance with the help of mobile bookstore or library to carry excellent foreign cultural resources into the vast rural areas, improving the English reading environment for left-behind children to read more and read well.

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