

ABSTRACT

Studies have shown that young children do not perform better than older children and adults in second language (L2) speech acquisition. Yet, the age effect on second language literacy learning without L2 speech fluency is not clear. This study investigated the relationship between the onset age and frequency of printed text reading and English (L2) proficiency in Hong Kong preschool children, who are exposed to L2 literacy at an early age without solid L2 speech understanding. Non-verbal intelligence, socioeconomic status, and education level of parents in relation to L2 attainment were also looked at. In addition, since the learning of a L2 is usually facilitated by the prior learning of the first language (L1) even when the two languages are very different, it was suspected that concurrent introduction of both Chinese (L1) and English (L2) literacy may not take advantage of the facilitation. In order to get a better insight, the correlation between Chinese and English language skills of the preschool children was also examined. Results revealed that the age at which reading was introduced did not predict the children's L2 proficiency later at an age of 6. However, the frequency of reading activities did explain the achievement. On the other hand, either higher family income or higher education level of parents contributed to the success in children's L2 learning. Positive correlation was also found between L1 and L2 language abilities.