

The Relationship Between the Social Support Role of Pet Dogs and Early Language Development in Children (0~6)

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Abstract: Early language education plays an important role in children's development. Combing the previous literature, we link the common pet dogs in the family with children's language ability and find that pet dogs have a positive impact on the development of children's language ability. In addition, this paper also puts forward the potential research directions in the future in this field. This paper proposes that pet dogs can positively affect the development of language skills in children from zero to six years old. It will make a great contribution to precocious, inspired, and family education for children.

1. Introduction

In recent years, a growing number of families are having a pet dog and prefer to keep their dogs with their children. Since 2014, the number of families with pets has grown continuously in China, with an annual growth rate of more than 10% and a trend of acceleration. In 2018, China's pet holders reached 73.55 million, accounting for 17.10% of the China's population. Pet dogs have always been the first choice of most families. (Zhiyan Consulting Co., Ltd., the report on the market analysis and research and development trend of China's pet industry from 2019 to 2025) As a result, the status of pet dogs in the family has risen and the pet dog has become an essential family member for some families.

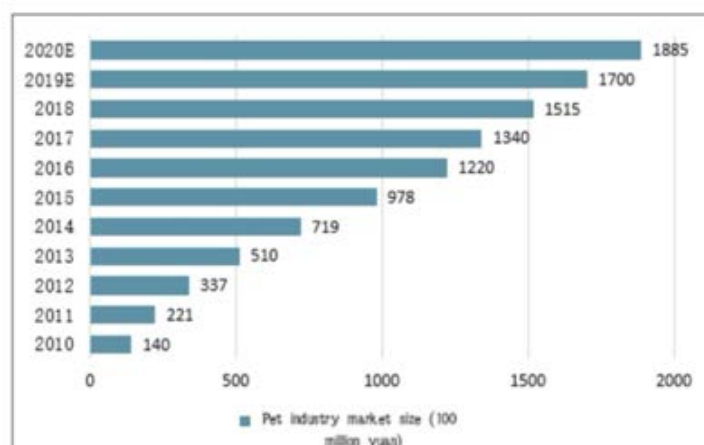


Fig. 1 Pet industry market size (100 million yuan)

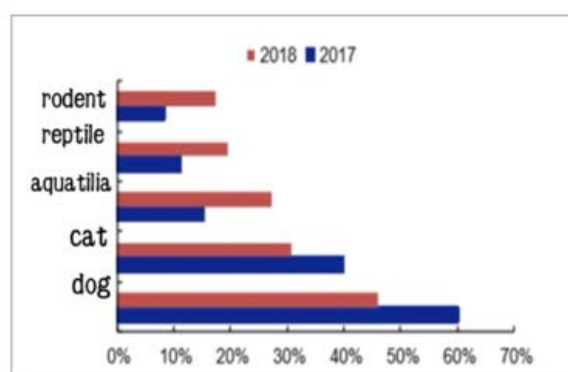


Fig. 2 Different types of pets

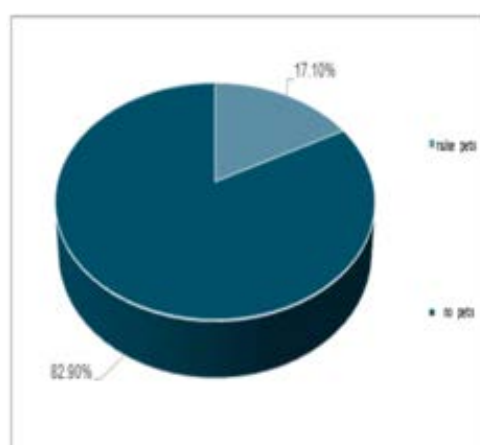


Fig. 3 China's Pet holders

With the increasing attention being paid to children's early education, young parents are seeking for effective methods to teach their children. Children's language ability is a part of the general cognitive ability of the brain, which is affected by both congenital inheritance and acquired education. Vygotsky, as a famous psychologist in the former Soviet Union, put forward the view that "language is central". He believed that it was very important for children to acquire language, because it enabled them to participate in the social life of their group, and at the same time, language also promoted children's thinking.

A study in Australia showed that twins and triplets have slower development of language communication systems than do singletons. For example, children of multiple births have shorter sentences and lesser vocabulary. At the age of 3, some children of multiple births can only speak one or two words, and it is often difficult for their parents to understand what they want to express. Compared with other children of the same age, twins and triplets have lower reading ability even if they can speak clearly at the age of 7. It was found that 79% of twins and 73% of triplets had at least mild language retardation (Fei Lin, 1997), which may due to the use of self-created language to communicate between multiple children, and their communication needs with adults are lower.

Therefore, whether pet dogs have positive effects on children's language development and how parents could capitalize pet dogs has become an important problem. Further attention should be paid to this issue, which may help a lot to children's early education, especially on family education guidance.

1.1 The Concept and Definition of Language

Language plays an important role in our daily communication, which includes understanding and expression. Language education includes listening, speaking, pre-reading and pre-writing in kindergarten, which is an important part of five fields of teaching. The language development of infants and young children is a crucial part of the development of their intelligence, and children have the opportunity and ability to develop this skills. Childhood, especially before the age of 5, is a critical

period of language development.

According to the differences of age, there are corresponding specific goals. The guide for learning and development of children aged 3-6 clearly shows that the development of children's language has an important impact in many fields. For example, in the social field, children communicate with teachers and partners in the same language. They could promote the ability of interpersonal communication, understanding others and judging the communicative situation, while developing language skills. However, language is not entirely innate. Acquired disposition also acts as an indispensable role in language development. Previous studies have shown that the development of children's language ability is significantly related to the amount of parents' knowledge, occupation and environmental language stimulation.

1.2 Classification of Pet Dogs

Pet dogs are divided into small dogs, medium dogs, and large dogs. According to a survey report on the behavior habits of Chinese pet owners in 2019 (You Chong, 2019), more than half of pet owners keep small dogs, and the Poodle is the first. Therefore, this study focuses on family dogs, predominately the Poodle, Yorkshire and so on. This kind of dog tends to be mild and they are easy to train. They are often accompany humans and are common to find in daily life.

Of course, the dogs' ability to provide for children's language development is limited to families that are willing and able to accept a dog. For families with poor family conditions and unable to keep a pet dog, families with family members allergic to dog fur are not included. Similarly, due to the diversity of students, this study is limited to family education and not suitable for application in the classroom.

2. The Possible Support Pet Dogs Could Give

On one hand, children's language learning ability can be promoted through their expression behavior to their pet dogs. Toddlers, on the other hand, are likely to promote language learning by listening to parents talking to their dogs.

2.1 The Importance of Pet Dogs to Children

Dogs are sometimes reputed to be the most loyal friends of human beings, and dog ownership is very common. For families with pet dogs, pet dogs play the role of family and friend to children. When parents are busy at work, the companionship of a pet dog can reduce loneliness for children. When children don't have anyone to confide in, they tend to confide in their pet dogs. Dogs serve as emotional companion and outlet for children.

We all know that pet dogs have always been children's faithful playmates, and they are often mentioned as one of children's most important partners. Pet dogs can increase children's feelings of being loved and needed and have a stronger sense of value and a more positive self-awareness. Bryan and others asked children to list 10 relationships that are most important to them. The results showed that pet partners are often more important than human partners. Children think that these "little partners" provide comfort and self-esteem for themselves and can keep their little secrets.

2.2 How Pet Dogs Influenced Children's Development in Language?

Previous studies emphasize the beneficial role of animals in children's development in society. The relationship with animals is believed to help children learn valuable interpersonal skills and promote a healthy transition to adulthood. "Kindergarten Education Guidelines" point out that "children should be created a free and relaxed language communication environment, to support, encourage and attract children to talk with teachers, peers or other people, and experience the fun of language communication". In the process of communicating with children, family members should patiently listen to children's speech and make appropriate responses, so that children can have the desire to continue to express, and dogs always can be there.

The research of Zhou Xia and her partner found that children with pets had lower loneliness, and less worry and fear than other children. In addition, the higher the level of children's attachment

to pets, the higher their self-concept, prosocial tendency and activities of daily living. In the process of getting along with pets, children are often more willing to express and share. And when observing the language used by parents and pets, children are more willing to imitate.

3. Differences in Attachment Between Pet Dogs and Parents

How to compare and distinguish social support and common interpersonal support is also one of the core of the core elements of pet research. Previous studies have shown that social support of pets is a supplement to rather than compensation for interpersonal support, and it will not compete and conflict with any interpersonal relationship (McConnell et al., 2011). Early studies have shown that there is a positive correlation between pet personality and human personality, and whether there is a pet in the family that will not affect the degree of attachment to the family (Kidd, 1995). Although human attachment to pets is different from human attachment to humans, there is little difference between them in function, which is to provide security and maintain intimacy. Moreover, with the increases of attachment, the difference between human and pets and between humans and humans intimacy will be smaller and smaller (Kurdek, 2008).

4. The Application of Pet Dogs in Education

As an important partner of human beings, a pet dog is the sustenance of and compensation for people's emotions in a rapidly developing society. The importance of a pet is becoming increasingly significant. The company of a pet dog can provide stable social support and an emotional outlet, and make up for the phenomenon that parents use more electronic products, which leads them to pay less attention to their children.

4.1 Pet Dogs Could Give Help to Special Children

More than two-thirds of autistic children like pet dogs, which promote children's social behavior. A French Autism Research Institute found that two-thirds of the 70 autistic children tracked had dogs in their families, and 94% of them were closely relating to the dogs. Dogs' unconditional and non-discriminatory love and companionship act as a social lubricant. When children play games or join small animals in family activities, it may be an effective way to encourage children's socialization. When children are busy with pets, they have 55% more social behaviors than when playing with toys. According to the research of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention of the United States, autistic children are more likely to communicate with their peers when they play with their pets, and there is no obstacle when they look at their pets' faces and make physical contact with other people (Weiguang He, 2015).

In addition, the long-term relationship with pet dogs may also promote the physiological changes of children. Scientists at Israel's Gertna Institute of Epidemiology and Sheba Medical Center have found that keeping a dog can help reduce blood pressure in children. In a stressful environment, the blood pressure of children who often play with dogs is 4.5 mlhg lower than that of children who don't have dogs (Sai Huang, 2017). This is because children will feel relaxed and happy when they play with dogs, and at the same time, they will increase their amount of exercise.

Animal-assisted intervention can improve the clinical symptoms of autistic children by including animals in the intervention process. Its research involves the measurement of children's social, language, emotional and other psychological characteristics (Hui Ma, Yongqian Ao, & Tingzhao Wang, 2018).

4.2 How Could Pet Dogs Perform Effectively?

Certainly, in the process of pets participating in education, the guidance of other family members is also important. For example, it matters how parents cultivate the habit and character of pets, as well as the way and content of daily communication between family members and pets. Whether the pets' personalities match with the children can also be related to the pet's promotion of the children's ability.

5. Conclusion and Questions Deserve Future Study

Future research in this field can focus on the social support provided by pet dogs and the development of preschool children's language ability. Compared with the previous studies regarding animal assistance therapy on special children, there have been few research discussions about the relationship between pets and ordinary children, especially in specific aspects, such as language development, socializing skill, of children's development. To provide more methods that can promote this relationship is important, so that the existence of pet dogs can be proved to better promote the development of children's language ability.

The first one is the application to everyday life. The finding of this study could be useful for parents to choose an appropriate animal as their kid's pet and then encourage their child to display pro-social behavior and thereby improve children's language and communication ability.

And another one is the individual and situational explanations. The situational side of the debate is supported here. Children would be matched on the environments with pet dogs or without pet dogs and there might be differences in language developments. Therefore, the situation that children found themselves in caused the difference in language proficiency.

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