

Article

Promoting Young Children's Interest in Learning English in EFL Context: The Role of Mothers

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Abstract: The purpose of this study was to investigate the effects of a mother's motivation for providing English education to a young child on the provision of English education and the child's interest in learning English. Also, the mediating role of the type of English education provided (English interaction at home and English private lessons) between a mother's motivation and a child's interest in learning English was examined. In total, 414 Korean mothers of 3-to-5-year-olds reported their motivation for providing English education to their child, frequency of English interaction at home, and the duration of English private lessons the child experienced. The degree of a child's interest in learning English was measured by both the child's mother and the teacher. The main results are as follows. First, a mother's integrative motivation had a positive effect on the provision of English education. On the other hand, a mother's instrumental motivation did not have a significant effect on the provision of English education. Also, a mother's integrative motivation had an indirect effect on a child's interest in learning English through English interaction at home. A mother's integrative motivation had a direct effect on a child's interest in learning English as well. This study is theoretically meaningful in that the concept of integrative and instrumental motivation of foreign language learners is extended to the mothers who provide foreign language education to their young children. Also, this study provides practical implications for early childhood mothers by highlighting the importance of integrative motivation and English interaction at home to enhance the child's interest in learning English.

Keywords: young child; interest in learning English; integrative motivation; instrumental motivation; home interaction

1. Introduction

There is a tendency in East Asian countries to begin English education from early childhood, since English is recognized as the official international language [1]. In South Korea, most children aged 3 to 5 years old regularly take English classes at kindergartens or daycare centers [2]. There is also a consistent demand for English education among mothers of early childhood children [3]. In fact, some mothers provide additional English education, either at home or outside, by enrolling their children in other English programs. Although English education in early childhood is already a widespread phenomenon, there is still a controversy over whether it is appropriate to provide English education during early childhood in South Korea. However, considering that most preschoolers are already exposed to English education, there is a need to move beyond the prevalent debate over the appropriateness of early English education; instead, we need to examine ways to support a developmentally appropriate foreign language learning environment that can enhance children's interest in learning English.

Interest is a significant factor in learning at any age, but it plays an especially crucial role in young children's learning. One of the basic principles of teaching-learning theory for early childhood is the interest-centered principle [4]. Young children start to concentrate on their learning activity when they are interested in the subject matter. Hence, learning occurs when children are interested and actively engaged in the learning activity [4]. As young children are in the beginning stages of learning English, their interest in learning the language may be more related to future outcomes than current language fluency. Despite the collective effort by society to teach foreign languages to children, only a few of them become fluent bilinguals. One of the reasons for such occurrence can be attributed to children's lack of interest and motivation in learning a foreign language [5]. Therefore, it is necessary to pay attention to the educational environment that can enhance children's interest in learning English.

When observing children's English learning environment, the role of parents should be highly considered, since young children's learning environment is most likely to be arranged by their parents. In particular, the mother plays a central role in building the English education environment of early childhood in South Korea [6,7]. Previous study showed that a mother's belief regarding early childhood English education was a crucial factor that influenced young children's attitudes toward learning English [8]. Especially since motivation is a strong explanatory variable behind the outcome of learning a foreign language as either successful or unsuccessful, a mother's motivation for providing English education to a child needs to be examined carefully [5]. The majority of past literature on motivation of foreign language learners has been conducted with a focus on foreign language learners themselves. However, in the case of young children, a mother's motivation for providing English education to a child has a stronger influence on the child's learning outcome than the child's motivation. Even children aged 6 to 14 years old were more affected by the practical educational environment than their own English learning motivation in an EFL (English as a foreign language) context [9]. Therefore, this study aims to examine the effects of a mother's motivation for providing practical English education to a young child on the child's interest in learning English.

We predicted that a mother's motivation for providing English education to a child will not affect the child's interest in learning English first hand. Rather, practical English educational environment organized by a mother can mediate the relationship between a mother's motivation for providing English education and a child's interest in learning English. In parallel, findings from a study support the view that children's attitude toward learning English tends to be more influenced by practical educational environment than abstract motivation [9]. Taking all these factors into consideration, two types of English education, namely English interaction at home and English private lessons will be observed in this study. These are the two types of English education that Korean mothers can choose to offer in addition to the English education children receive in their kindergartens or preschools. In summary, the purpose of this study is to examine the influence of a mother's motivation for providing English education to a child on the provision of English education and the child's interest in learning English. Also, the mediating role of English educational environment provided by a mother between a mother's motivation and a child's interest in learning English will be investigated. This study will provide implications for the educational environment to promote young children's interest in learning English.

2. Literature Review

The concepts that have been widely used to study motivation of foreign language learning are integrative motivation and instrumental motivation. Integrative motivation refers to the desire to learn a foreign language in order to understand another language group and to communicate with diverse people. Integrative motivation was first introduced to explain the motivation of second language learners residing in a society where people with different languages and cultures live together [5,10]. Recently, however, integrative motivation has been expanded to learners who are motivated to acquire English as an international language and be integrated into the global community [11]. Instrumental motivation refers to the desire to learn a foreign language for practical reasons, such as securing a job,

earning more money, and succeeding in school. Previous studies have shown that foreign language learning outcomes vary depending on the type of motivation [5,12,13]. However, attention in literature has been prevalently focused on the motivation of the foreign language learners themselves; hence, this study aims to examine the influence of a mother's motivation for providing a foreign language learning environment to young children. Particular focus will be placed on whether or not the child's interest in learning English is influenced by the type of mother's motivation.

A number of lines of evidence suggest that integrative motivation leads to more positive results in learning a foreign language in comparison to instrumental motivation (see [5]). This is because integrative motivation concerns an interpersonal relationship that is maintained for a longer period of time. Instrumental motivation, on the other hand, lasts for a shorter period because it diminishes once the goal is achieved or finished [5,14]. However, a few studies also reported positive effects of instrumental motivation [e.g. 12,13]. For example, students with instrumental motivation studied a foreign language for a longer period than students without it when they had an opportunity to gain benefits from learning [12]. Taken together, the results of previous studies suggest that one of the two types of motivation is not fundamentally more advantageous in foreign language learning outcomes. The relative effects of the two motivations can be different depending on the personal and social factors [15]. Therefore, it is necessary to examine the complex effects of the two types of mother's motivations on the child's interest in learning English considering other factors, rather than simply investigating the effects of each motivation separately.

In order to identify how the relationship between a mother's motivation and a child's interest in learning English is linked, the present study will consider two types of English educational environment provided by mothers—English interaction at home and English private lessons. English interaction at home is a teaching method employed by the parents to provide an English education environment (i.e., reading books, video, and English conversation) for children at home. This method of English education is currently gaining attention among young children's parents in Korea [6,16]. According to a recent study which analyzed online text data of South Korea [6], keywords such as "mother", "homeschooling", and "contents" were highly related with English education for young children. The researchers concluded that mothers are interested in teaching English to their children at home by themselves. This educational method is one of the phenomena that shows diversification of English education both online and offline [17–19]. Despite the high interest of mothers, research on English interaction at home is still in its infancy, and few studies have been fulfilled so far. This may be due to the fact that this method of English education has only recently attracted attention. Among these few are studies about parent's perceptions and practices on English education at home [8,16] and the effects of reading English books with mothers on young children's English ability [20,21]. However, previous studies are still limited both in amount and scope.

English private lessons in the present study refer to additional English classes taken at institutions other than kindergartens or preschools. Private English lessons are taught either by a child visiting the institution or a teacher visiting the child's home. Much more research has been conducted on this education method compared to the English interaction at home. In one study that analyzed the research trends related to early childhood English education [22], various topics have been examined, such as the effect of English private lessons on children's English ability and attitude, analysis of textbooks used in the class, and interviews with educational institutions and textbook developers to find solutions to problems in early childhood English education. However, previous studies have rarely examined the impact of English private lessons on a child's interest in learning English while considering a mother's motivation for providing English education to a child.

In short, this study aims to examine whether the two different types of mother's motivations for providing English education to a young child influences the provision of English education and on a child's interest in learning English. In addition, we will investigate whether the type of English education provided by mothers mediates the relationship between a mother's motivation for providing English education and a child's interest in learning English. Figure 1 shows the research model.

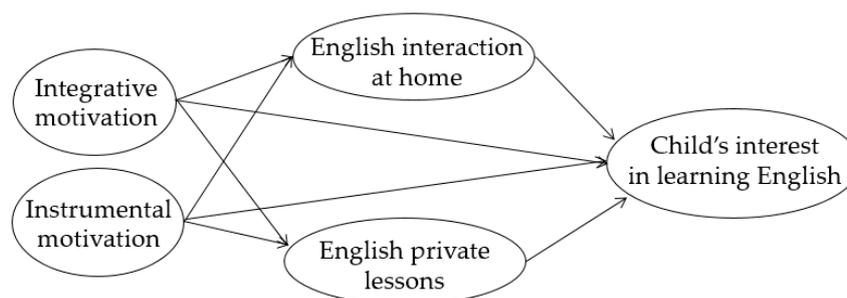


Figure 1. This figure shows the research model. First, the influence of a mother’s integrative motivation and instrumental motivation on a mother’s provision of English education will be examined. Also, the indirect effects of a mother’s motivation on a child’s interest in learning English through the type of English education provided (English interaction at home and English private lessons) will be tested. Lastly, the direct effects of a mother’s motivation on a child’s interest in learning English will be investigated.

The research questions of the present study are as follows:

- Research question 1: Does a mother’s motivation for providing English education to a young child (integrative motivation and instrumental motivation) have an influence on the provision of English education (English interaction at home and English private lessons)?
- Research question 2: Does a mother’s motivation for providing English education to a young child (integrative motivation and instrumental motivation) have an influence on a child’s interest in learning English?
 - Research question 2.1.: Does a mother’s motivation for providing English education to a young child have an indirect influence on a child’s interest in learning English through the type of English education provided (English interaction at home and English private lessons)?
 - Research question 2.2.: Does a mother’s motivation for providing English education to a young child have a direct influence on a child’s interest in learning English?

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Subjects

The subject of this study were 414 mothers of 3, 4, and 5 year old children living in Seoul, Busan, Gyeonggi, and Gyeongsang provinces of South Korea, and 45 English teachers of kindergartens or English immersion education schools. Among 414 children, 193 children were boys (46.6%). Also, 217 children attended kindergartens (52.4%), and 197 children were from English immersion education schools (47.6%). All children regularly took English classes in kindergartens or English immersion education schools.

3.2. Measures

3.2.1. Mother’s Motivations for Providing English Education

Mother’s motivations for providing English education to a child were measured by the modified version of Gardner and his colleagues’ scale [10,23]. Since the original scale was targeted to measure the motivation of foreign language learners themselves, the scale was revised to assess the mother’s motivation for providing English education to their children.

Mother’s motivations for providing English education were divided into integrative motivation and instrumental motivation. Integrative motivation was measured through three items: “to supply the child opportunities to communicate with diverse people”, “to help the child understand other

cultures”, and “to improve the child’s openness to foreigners”. The internal consistency of these items was 0.62 ($\alpha = 0.62$). Also, instrumental motivation was measured through three items: “to prepare the child for English classes in elementary school”, “to improve the child’s basic skills for an academic career”, and “to increase the child’s basic skills for social success”. The internal consistency of these items was 0.66 ($\alpha = 0.66$). All items were measured using a 4 point Likert scale.

3.2.2. Type of English Education Provided

English Interaction at Home

Questionnaires were used to measure the level of interaction parents practiced at home using English. Mothers were asked to report on the frequency of their interaction in English with their child at home. The types of English interactions considered in this study were: (1) reading books together, (2) singing songs together, (3) doing finger-play or chanting together, (4) using internet contents together, and (5) communicating in English. All items were measured on a 4 point Likert scale (never to frequently). The internal consistency of items was highly reliable ($\alpha = 0.80$).

English Private Lessons

Mothers reported on the duration of their child attending private English lessons aside from the English classes offered by the child’s Kindergarten or English immersion schools. The English private lessons considered in this study were in-home tutoring and classes taken in other learning institutions, which are basically the same teaching methods. The only difference is the physical location of the lessons, as either the private teacher visits the child’s house or the child visits the institution to meet the private teacher. Since Korean English private tutoring institutions commonly give mothers the option of in-home tutoring or classes taken in the institutions, these two types of English private lessons were considered in this study. The duration of the child’s use of English private lessons was measured in months. If the child has never received English private lessons, it was coded as 0.

3.2.3. Child’s Interest in Learning English

A modified version of scales, based on previous literature [8,24–26], were utilized. All items were revised to describe the child’s behavior reflecting the child’s English interest, so that mothers and teachers could assess the child’s daily behaviour based on their observations. The modified version of the scale was further reviewed by two formal preschool English teachers with eight years of experience. Child’s interest in learning English was not only evaluated by the mothers, but also by the teachers. By doing so, this study accounts the child’s behaviour towards English both at home and classroom environment. Mothers evaluated 12 items, including “looks forward to English class”, “wants to have more time to learn English than now”, and “is willing to play using English materials (e.g., books, videos) at home”. Also, teachers rated 9 items, including “actively participates in classroom activity”, “wants to present a lot during English class”, and “asks questions when the student does not understand or is curious about something during class”. All items were measured on a 4 point Likert scale. The internal consistency of 21 items was highly reliable ($\alpha = 0.87$).

3.3. Statistical Analysis

Frequency and correlation analyses were performed using SPSS 19.0 to investigate the characteristics of variables. Also, structural equation analysis and bootstrapping were conducted using Mplus 8.2 to identify the complex relationship among variables, such as the mother’s motivation, the type of English education provided, and the child’s interest in learning English.

4. Results

4.1. Frequency and Correlation Analysis

First, the absolute values of skewness and kurtosis of 13 observed variables were examined to confirm whether they met the assumption of normality (Table 1). Since English private lessons violated the assumption (skewness = 2.50, kurtosis = 7.45) [27], they were put into the model after performing log transformations (skewness = 1.29, kurtosis = 0.07 after log transformations). Because some of the values of the English private lessons were 0, 0.001 was added to all values before performing log transformations. Next, the results of correlation analysis (Table 1) shows that the mean of mothers' integrative motivations and the mean of instrumental motivation were positively correlated ($r = 0.29$, $p < 0.01$). Also, the mean of mothers' integrative motivations were positively correlated with the both types of English education provided—English interaction at home ($r = 0.21$, $p < 0.01$), and English private lessons ($r = 0.17$, $p < 0.01$). The mean of mothers' instrumental motivation was positively correlated with English interaction at home ($r = 0.18$, $p < 0.01$), but had no significant relationship with English private lessons. Two types of English education, English interaction at home and English private lessons, were positively correlated ($r = 0.23$, $p < 0.01$). Finally, children's interest in learning English was positively correlated with the mean of mother's integrative motivation, instrumental motivation, and both types of English education provided ($r = 0.11$ - 0.37 , $p < 0.05$ or 0.01).

Table 1. Correlations among variables, mean, standard deviation, skewness, and kurtosis ($N = 414$).

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
1	—															
2	0.29 **	—														
3	0.28 **	0.52 **	—													
4	0.72 **	0.80 **	0.76 **	—												
5	0.15 **	0.04	0.14 **	0.14 **	—											
6	0.16 **	0.23 **	0.18 **	0.26 **	0.28 **	—										
7	0.21 **	0.20 **	0.24 **	0.28 **	0.33 **	0.57 **	—									
8	0.22 **	0.22 **	0.24 **	0.29 **	0.70 **	0.79 **	0.82 **	—								
9	0.14 **	0.14 **	0.12 *	0.18 **	0.11 *	0.11 *	0.05	0.11 *	—							
10	0.15 **	0.07	0.10 *	0.15 **	0.14 **	0.12 *	0.13 *	0.17 **	0.59 **	—						
11	0.04	0.13 *	0.08	0.11 *	0.08	0.20 **	0.12 *	0.17 **	0.41 **	0.51 **	—					
12	0.11 *	0.05	0.07	0.10 *	0.17 **	0.09	0.05	0.14 **	0.36 **	0.47 **	0.43 **	—				
13	0.23 **	0.20 **	0.17 **	0.26 **	0.17 **	0.08	0.09	0.14 **	0.44 **	0.46 **	0.38 **	0.49 **	—			
14	0.18 **	0.16 **	0.14 **	0.21 **	0.16 **	0.15 **	0.11 *	0.18 **	0.74 **	0.80 **	0.72 **	0.74 **	0.74 **	—		
15	0.08	0.12 *	0.18 **	0.17 **	0.06	0.06	0.05	0.08	0.19 **	0.13 *	0.18 **	0.17 **	0.21 **	0.23 **	—	
16	0.23 **	0.22 **	0.24 **	0.30 **	0.22 **	0.16 **	0.19 **	0.26 **	0.32 **	0.29 **	0.23 **	0.25 **	0.37 **	0.37 **	0.11 *	—
M	3.30	3.14	3.47	3.31	2.99	2.74	2.78	2.84	2.71	2.84	2.00	2.34	2.56	2.47	−3.80	3.03
SD	0.77	0.74	0.63	0.54	0.88	0.85	0.88	0.67	0.95	0.94	0.92	1.03	1.00	0.72	4.44	0.48
Skewness	−1.00	−0.44	−0.90	−0.57	−0.39	−0.23	−0.28	−0.30	−0.50	−0.62	0.50	−0.03	−0.27	−0.33	0.76	0.25
Kurtosis	0.64	−0.36	0.33	0.24	−0.81	−0.56	−0.64	0.24	−0.64	−0.42	−0.71	−1.24	−1.00	−0.32	−1.39	−0.56

Note: 1 = To communicate with diverse people (integrative 1), 2 = Understanding other cultures (integrative 2), 3 = To improve openness to foreigners (integrative 3), 4 = Mean of integrative motivation, 5 = To prepare for English classes in elementary school (instrumental 1), 6 = To improve skills for academic career (instrumental 2), 7 = To increase skills for social success (instrumental 3), 8 = Mean of instrumental motivation, 9 = Books, 10 = Songs, 11 = Finger-play or chanting, 12 = Internet contents, 13 = Communication, 14 = Mean of English interaction at home, 15 = (log-transformed) English private lessons, 16 = Child's interest in learning English; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$.

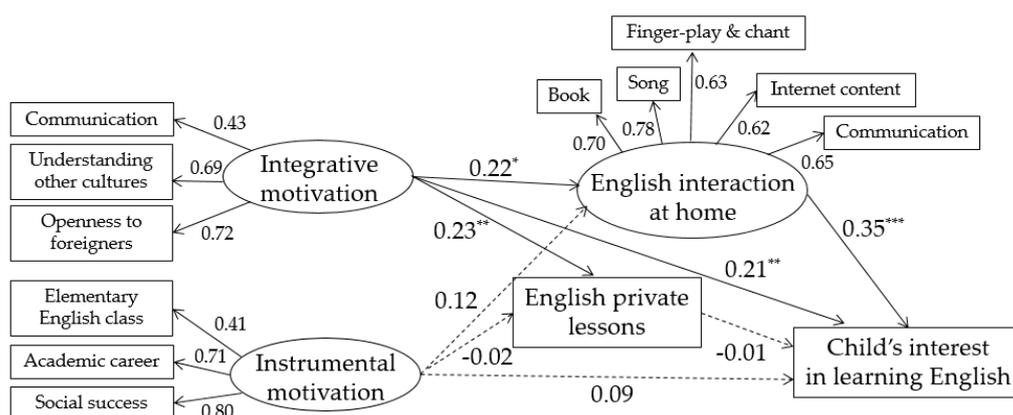
4.2. Structural Equation Analysis

We considered χ^2 , RMSEA (Root Mean Square Error of Approximation), SRMR (Standardized Root Mean square Residual), CFI (Comparative Fit Index), and TLI (Tucker-Lewis Index) to test the model fit. Table 2 shows that the model fit was acceptable [28] (RMSEA < 0.08, SRMR < 0.08, CFI > 0.90, TLI > 0.90). Figure 2 shows the results of the final model. Regarding the first research question, we hypothesized that a mother’s motivation for providing English education to a young child would have an influence on the mother’s provision of English education. As shown in Figure 2, this hypothesis was partially accepted. That is, only mother’s integrative motivation had a significant effect on the two types of English education provided, English interaction at home ($\beta = 0.22, p < 0.05$), and English private lessons ($\beta = 0.23, p < 0.01$). Mothers with higher integrative motivation provided more English interaction at home and English private lessons. In contrast, mother’s instrumental motivation had no significant impact on both types of English education provided. In the second research question, it was hypothesized that a mother’s motivation for providing English education to a young child would indirectly affect a child’s interest in learning English through the type of English education provided. As shown in Figure 2, this hypothesis was also partially correct. In other words, only the mother’s integrative motivation had an indirect effect on a child’s interest in learning English through English interaction at home ($\beta = 0.35, p < 0.001$). This means that mothers with higher integrative motivation tend to provide more English interaction at home, and this behavior significantly increases the child’s interest in learning English. Also, a mother’s integrative motivation had a direct effect on a child’s interest in learning English ($\beta = 0.21, p < 0.01$). However, the hypothesis that a mother’s instrumental motivation would indirectly affect a child’s interest in learning English through the type of English education provided was rejected. The hypothesis that the mother’s instrumental motivation would have a direct effect on a child’s interest in learning was also rejected.

Table 2. Structural model fit (N = 414).

χ^2	df	RMSEA 90% C.I.	SRMR	CFI	TLI
129.44 ***	58	0.055 {0.042–0.067}	0.053	0.937	0.915

*** p < 0.001.



* p < 0.05; ** p < 0.01; *** p < 0.001.

Figure 2. This figure shows the final model. All values are expressed in standardized coefficients. A mother’s integrative motivation had a significant effect on the provision of English education (English interaction at home and English private lessons). On the other hand, a mother’s instrumental motivation had no significant effect on the provision of English education. Also, English interaction at home mediated the relationship between a mother’s integrative motivation and a child’s interest in learning English. However, English private lessons did not have a mediating effect. Lastly, a mother’s integrative motivation had a direct effect on a child’s interest in learning English.

4.3. Bootstrapping

Bootstrapping ($n = 10,000$) was conducted to confirm the mediating effect of English interaction at home. As shown in Table 3, the indirect effect of a mother's integrative motivation on a child's interest in learning English through English interaction at home was significant ($\beta = 0.08$, $p < 0.05$, 95% C.I. {0.012–0.144}). In other words, mothers with higher integrative motivation were more likely to interact with children using English at home, and this behaviour had a positive effect on the child's interest in learning English.

Table 3. Mediating effect test ($N = 414$).

Path	β	Indirect Effect Bias-Corrected 95% C.I.
Integrative motivation → English interaction at home → Child's interest in learning English	0.08 *	0.012–0.144

* $p < 0.05$.

5. Discussion

This study aimed to investigate the effects of a mother's motivation for providing English education to a young child on a mother's provision of English education and the child's interest in learning English. Also, the mediating role of the two types of English education provided (English interaction at home and English private lessons) between the relationship of a mother's motivation and a child's interest in learning English was examined.

Regarding the first research question about the effects of a mother's motivation on the provision of English education to a child, our results showed that mothers with higher integrative motivation provided more English interaction at home and English private lessons to their child. On the other hand, the hypothesis that a mother's instrumental motivation would affect the provision of both types of English education was rejected. This difference can be interpreted through the result of previous studies that showed second language learners with integrative motivation participated more consistently in learning activities than those with instrumental motivation [5,14]. As learners with instrumental motivation intend to learn the second language for practical purposes, such as examinations or job acquisitions, learning activity does not occur continuously when the goal is achieved or finished. On the other hand, learners with high integrative motivation who have the desire to understand certain language groups and to converse with diverse people tend to participate in second language learning more constantly. The results of this study also showed that a mother's instrumental motivation did not have a significant effect on the provision of two types of English education. Such a result may be because the children investigated in this study are still very young and have not yet faced practical goals such as academic or career achievements. Meanwhile, according to the findings of this study, mothers with higher integrative motivation tend to expose their child to English at a young age to increase their child's openness towards English.

As a result of examining the second research question about the indirect effects of a mother's motivation on a child's interest in learning English through the type of English education provided, English interaction at home mediated the relationship between mother's integrative motivation and child's interest in learning English. In contrast, English private lessons did not mediate the relationship. These results are consistent with the previous study, which showed the positive influence of parent's help and concern in English education on the young child's interest in learning English [16]. The reason why children were more influenced by English interaction at home than English private lessons was not clearly revealed in the present study. English interaction at home is different from English private lessons in a sense that parents who already have intimate ties with the child are the ones providing the educational environment. In addition, interacting in English at home creates a rather comfortable natural learning environment in comparison to an artificial setting. Taking this into account, it is

necessary to examine which characteristics of English interaction at home can enhance a child's interest in learning English in future studies.

Also, the hypothesis that a mother's motivation for providing English education to a young child would directly affect a child's interest in learning English was partially accepted. That is, only mother's integrative motivation had a direct effect on a child's interest in learning English. This means that there was still a positive influence of a mother's integrative motivation on a child's interest in learning English, which is not fully explained by the mediating effect of English interaction at home. Since a mother's integrative motivation itself does not affect the interest of a child, future studies need to further clarify the kinds of mother's behavior derived from the mother's integrative motivation is directly related to the child's interest in learning English.

Finally, the mother's instrumental motivation was positively correlated with integrative motivation, and instrumental motivation had no significant influence on the child's interest in learning English, English interaction at home, and English private lessons. These results are in line with previous studies, which showed that integrative motivation and instrumental motivation lead to different learning outcomes even when both motivations are positively correlated [13,29]. Although this finding was not directly related to the research questions of this study, it was an interesting result. When the correlations of all variables were separately investigated, instrumental motivation was significantly correlated with English interaction at home and a child's interest in learning English. However, when the instrumental motivation was put into the model with integrative motivation, instrumental motivation showed no significant influence on English interaction at home and a child's interest in learning English. The significantly correlated relationship between instrumental motivation and those variables may be fundamentally due to integrative motivation, which is positively correlated with instrumental motivation. It is suggestive from these results that instrumental motivation and integrative motivation cannot be discretely separated, and hence, should be analyzed together in future studies to consider their complex relationship.

This study has limitations in measuring the interest of children learning English because it was measured indirectly through the report of teachers and mothers. New methods, such as facial expressions or physiological indicators, are needed to directly measure the interest of children. Also, although this study showed that English interaction at home was helpful for children to increase their interest in learning English, it is important to note that ignoring developmental demands of young children and excessive provision of English stimuli at home may cause side effects. Therefore, further research is needed to provide implications for adequate ways of providing English education at home in line with the child's developmental properties. Despite limitations, this study is theoretically meaningful in that it applied the concept of integrative and instrumental motivations of second language learners to mothers who provide English education to their children. In addition, this study provides practical implications for Korean mothers to enhance children's interest in learning English by interacting in English at home and educating children with an integrative motivation.

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