

A Review of the Design Principles and Effects of Oral Language Tools for Primary School English as a Foreign Language Learners

Xinyao Chen

*Xianda College of Economics and Humanities, Shanghai International Studies University, Shanghai,
China
chenxinyao942@gmail.com*

Abstract. In the era of globalization and technological development, oral English proficiency has become one of the key language skills for primary school English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. Oral English tools have become an important means for primary school EFL learners to improve their oral English skills. This article reviews the relevant research on the oral ability of primary school EFL learners in recent years, sorts out and discusses the main design principles and application effects of oral tools. In terms of design, oral English tools need to have a simple and gamified interface, adapt to the cognitive development patterns of primary school students' age groups, and provide emotional support in order to let primary school EFL learners to take the initiative in learning and improve their oral fluency and pronunciation. However, existing research indicates that although some oral language tools have covered the shortage of traditional oral language teaching, there is still a lack in the combination of pronunciation accuracy and humanistic teaching concepts.

Keywords: Primary school EFL, Oral English, Design of oral language tools

1. Introduction

In the context of globalization and the continuous improvement of technological levels, because English is the universal language for international communication, its education is getting more and more attention from people. Oral English, as an important English skill, how to use oral language tools to help English as a Foreign Language learners improve their oral English skills efficiently has become one of the important issues in current research. For instance, Gulu Oral English, which is currently widely used and produced by a team from Tsinghua University, focusing on Artificial Intelligence(AI)-based situational dialogues to provide immersive scenarios for learners. Oral communication tools such as Hello Talk and Duolingo, which allow learners to chat freely with native speakers. This article mainly focuses on two issues by reviewing some studies in recent years: First, what key design principles should oral language tools grasp for primary school English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners? Secondly, what effects have oral language tools produced in practical applications?

2. Main design principles

2.1. Stimulation of learners' interest

The term "interest" is defined as a desire or curiosity to explore things with a proactive mindset, serving as intrinsic motivation that drives learners' pursuit of knowledge. Generally, interest arises from human endeavors and often requires sustained effort [1].

A key advantage for elementary school students in learning English lies in their innate desire to explore novel subjects. However, such enthusiasm is often short-lived and fleeting. Therefore, the design of oral language tools should prioritize rapidly igniting students' learning interest during the initial stages thereby maximizing the utilization of their limited yet highly-focused attentional resources. For instance, incorporating gamification elements into oral tools can stimulate pupils' sensory engagement or integrating popular IP-based voice content (with appropriate authorization) that aligns with students' familiar contexts can foster an engaging learning atmosphere, ultimately mitigating the monotonous nature of study.

2.2. Alignment with learners' psychological and cognitive development

Piaget's theory of cognitive development refers to the development process of human thinking, knowledge and learning. It is summarized as a constantly changing dynamic system, in which each stage has different ways of thinking, abilities and processes [2]. According to the phased laws of Piaget's Cognitive Development Theory, primary school students age 7 to 12 are in the concrete operational stage. This theory provides a strong design principle basis for the learning content and interface design of oral tools. The thinking of 7-12 years old primary school students cannot be separated from the support of concrete things and abstract logical thinking has not fully matured. Their attention span is also relatively short. Therefore, in the design of the learning content of oral tools, designers need to formulate learning tasks and language complexity levels that are suitable for different cognitive levels of primary school learners at different difficulties. Moreover, the interface of oral tools must be simple and clear in order to avoid information overload, thereby students' cognitive burden can be reduced and their learning efficiency can be improved. For example, the learning scenarios should be close to the real life of learners and the next learning content should be planned based on the completion degree and the study time of students' learning, as well as the interface of oral tools should not have overly complex patterns or buttons.

2.3. Emotional support

Learning strategies are systematic methods for learners to acquire knowledge and master skills. They can be roughly divided into three core types: The first is the cognitive strategy which includes techniques such as rehearsal, knowledge structuring and summarization to help learners digest learning materials. The second is the metacognitive strategy. Its core lies in formulating plans, supervising the learning process and evaluating the outcomes, which are used to regulate learners' learning. The third is the resource management strategy. Such as planning time, creating an optimal learning environment and seeking assistance from others thereby providing external support for learners.

Psychological factors—such as tension, inferiority, confidence and impatience—play a significant role in the application of learning strategies [3]. Anxiety is an emotional state characterized in particular by worry and fear about future events. According to Chinese scholars,

anxiety often stems from an individual's sense of frustration due to unmet expectations which in turn triggers feelings of tension and fear [4].

Emotional support serves as a critical factor influencing whether elementary school EFL learners maintain sustained motivation and willingness to engage in verbal communication. According to research, motivation, anxiety and confidence each play different regulatory roles in language learning. The positive and negative effects they produce will have a significant impact on the application effect of learning strategies [3].

3. Review of the effects of oral language tool

In recent years, many studies have shown that the application of oral tools in primary school English teaching has presented multi-dimensional positive impacts in stimulating learning motivation, improving language fluency and optimizing pronunciation accuracy. For example, one researcher used a semi-structured questionnaire to conduct a study involving 48 first-year students in the English Department of the "Asia Jabbar" Higher Normal School in Constantin, Algeria. The research result showed that gamification is a powerful tool to enhance oral communication skills by overcoming the difficulties encountered by English learners [5]. At the same time, oral anxiety is a core emotional barrier that hinders EFL learners from speaking and expressing themselves. And many studies showed that the oral tools can effectively alleviate the students' anxiety efficiently by creating a low-pressure and non-judgmental practice environment. Students' physiological anxiety responses, such as accelerated heartbeat, sweating, and body tremors, can be improved when oral language tools have emotional support functions such as encouraging feedback and error normalization prompts.

3.1. Enhancement of learning enthusiasm

Students' concentration will be significantly improved when they are attracted by interesting things. There is an undoubted a great choice that gamifying oral language tools which can break the dullness of traditional oral language learning in teaching and thereby enhances the learning enthusiasm of primary school students. For instance, English dubbing is a way to gamify learning. By making learners have a series of imitation dubbing for the characters or segments they are interested in that match their difficulty level so that passive learning can be transformed into active learning and enhance learners' motivation to learn. At the same time, during the dubbing process, a series of positive feedback and positive evaluations should be provided to give students the encouragement they deserve, which can increase their confidence. Take the virtual scenario dialogue and AI feedback in the Oral 100 Smart Learning Space as an example. It has achieved a teaching closed loop of learning - evaluation - correction. Among its "film and television dubbing" and human-computer dialogue training functions, teachers' use of these functions can increase students' interest in learning by playing cartoon clips that primary school students love through this function. After playing the clips, teachers ask the primary school students to do the dubbing for the clips they have watched and then have the platform score them, so that the students are in a comfortable and low-anxiety atmosphere, and thus highly participate in the oral training, thus breaking the "dumb" English learning [6].

3.2. Improvement of fluency

The improvement of oral expression ability of primary school students mainly depends on the adaptation of oral tools in terms of context setting, task form and feedback methods to the thinking characteristics of specific operation stages. The improvement of oral English skills among primary school students mainly relies on the adaptation of visual scenarios, feedback mechanisms and fragmented tasks to the thinking characteristics of specific operation stages. Primary school students can improve their fluency in English by engaging in human-computer dialogue with oral communication tools in situational interactions. An experiment was conducted for fifth-grade primary school students who were in the transitional stage of arithmetic. The experimenter designed a game based on the learning content of Unit 1 of the fifth grade English textbook, taking Unit 1 as an example. The research method involved distributing questionnaires to a total of 103 students in the experimental class and the control class, and collecting 101 valid questionnaires. The results indicate that through the use of games, students can be immersed in the scene, thereby alleviating their psychological anxiety. This allows students' body language and verbal output express themselves naturally. During the continuous output of students' oral English, their fluency in oral English has been greatly improved [7]. In Shi Zhijie's research on enhancing primary school students' oral English proficiency through an applied education app (See Table 1), he incorporated the function of picture book reading into the app, allowing students to use the Application (APP) for a period of two months. The research was conducted through the form of collecting and distributing questionnaires. The research results showed that immersing students in scenarios closely related to their lives can make up for the deficiencies in oral language learning caused by the environment. Moreover, during the continuous follow-up reading process of students, their daily language expression ability and the ability to summarize texts have both been enhanced [8].

Table 1. Comparison of dialogue ability levels between the experimental and control classes

Type of ability	Proportion of experimental classes	Proportion of the control class
Can have a thought dialogue	54%	16%
Can have simple conversation	34%	18%
Intelligently complete dialogues based on book sentence patterns	8%	42%
Completely unable to have a conversation	4%	24%

3.3. Improvement of pronunciation

With the help of effective oral tools, students' pronunciation can show certain improvements through continuous listening and practice. In a study involving 92 primary school students (an experimental research on using mobile technology to improve students' oral English skills), researchers asked the students complete a semester's homework in the form of fun dubbing. After students submitting the homework on the platform, the teacher evaluated its effectiveness, pointed out the mistakes and asked the students to make timely corrections. The research data shows that after students use dubbing software, their average score is 1.45 higher than that of students who do not use dubbing software, with a P value <0.05 and a t value =-10.961. The results prove that fun dubbing software has a significant effect on improving the pronunciation and intonation of primary school students [9] (See Table 2). However, this research still presents several limitations. This is because the researchers' experimental samples were relatively small, and they were also affected by such factors of force majeure. For instance, as a "fun dubbing" software after class, the parents' emphasis and supervision on their children's learning were different.

Table 2. Results of T-test

Classes	Mean value	Standard deviation	T-value	Sig.
Experimental class	4.58	0.58	-10.961	0.000
Control class	3.13	0.68	-10.961	0.000

3.4. Shortcoming

Although gamified oral English tools can not only enhance the enthusiasm of primary school students but also improve their fluency and pronunciation in an interesting learning process, excessive gamified oral English tools may to some extent reduce the desire of students and teachers to interact in class, resulting in a decrease in the dialogue between teachers and students in class. It has disrupted the coherence and coordination of classroom teaching which results in the problem of low learning efficiency among students in class. Current oral communication tools still have limitations in improving pronunciation accuracy and complex communication. Studies have shown that the effectiveness of gamified oral language tools in learning is influenced by several aspects. The teaching environment in which students are located has a significant impact on the effectiveness of gamified oral language tools, such as the learning environment in which students are located, the teaching methods of teachers, and the learning resources they can obtain [10]. At the same time, current research is lacking in longitudinal studies to evaluate long-term effects, and the novelty effect of the technology may fade after six weeks.

4. Conclusion

In an era of continuous technological development, using oral language tools to enhance primary school EFL speaking skills is a convenient and efficient approach. For primary school EFL learners lacking a real English language environment, oral English tools have broken the traditional one-way classroom model of "teachers speaking and students listening". They can consolidate the knowledge points taught by teachers after class and incorporate what they have learned into oral communication with language tools. At the same time, they are less affected by spatial constraints, allowing for practice anytime and thus lowering the threshold for oral language learning.

It is necessary to conform to the specific operational stage thinking characteristics of primary school students, the feature of being influenced by emotions, and follow the cognitive laws of primary school students to stimulate their interest when designing a good oral language tool. Such oral tools will attract EFL learners and stimulate their interest in active learning. During the autonomous and interesting learning process, as their anxiety decreases, their confidence in oral expression significantly improves, which leads to an enhancement in both their oral fluency and pronunciation proficiency.

All in all, the suitable oral communication tools for primary school EFL learners can make up for the shortcomings of insufficient oral communication opportunities in traditional teaching and so on. In the future, oral language tools not only need to optimize their technology in design to offer more humanized and natural interaction, but also need to be deeply integrated with humanistic educational concepts to provide targeted oral practice and real-time pronunciation correction for primary school EFL learners, allowing them to have a good learning environment.

References

- [1] Wang, X. (2023). Research on cultivating English learning interest and promoting oral expression among young learners in family settings (Master's thesis, Shenzhen University).
- [2] Kong, J. (2023). English education based on Piaget's cognitive development theory. *Global Academic Frontiers*, 1(1), 32–38.
- [3] Liu, F. Q., Min, M., & Xiong, K. Y. (2025). Research on the impact of learning strategies regulated by psychological factors of foreign language learners on second language acquisition effects. *Journal of Wenshan University*, 38(4), 100–106.
- [4] Li, J. H. (2025). The impact of artificial intelligence teaching on the academic performance of primary school English learners: The moderating role of cognitive style (Master's thesis, Sichuan Normal University).
- [5] Boumaza, S., & Mezhoud, S. (2025). The impact of gamification tools on improving learners' engagement in oral communication classroom. *Youdaoplaceholder0*, 20(1), 839–855.
- [6] Liang, J. L. (2025). The practice of artificial intelligence promoting the quality and efficiency improvement of primary school English oral teaching: A case study of Oral 100 smart learning space. *Guangxi Education*, (22), 53–56.
- [7] Wang, D. Y. (2025). Research on the application of multimedia teaching games in primary school English listening and speaking classes (Master's thesis, Ningxia University).
- [8] Shi, Z. J. (2019). Research on improving primary school students' oral English proficiency through applied education apps (Master's thesis, Guangxi Normal University).
- [9] Liu, Y. M. (2019). Experimental research on improving oral English proficiency of primary school students by using mobile technology. *Foreign Language Teaching in Primary and Secondary Schools (Primary School Edition)*, 42(12), 13–18.
- [10] Ponce Anchundia, L. S., & Chancay Cedeno, C. H. (2024). Gamificación para mejorar la comunicación oral en los estudiantes de inglés: Revisión sistemática de la literatura. *Ciencia Latina: Revista Multidisciplinar*, 8(6).