



A Study of Cake English App - One of Children's Picture Books Reading Apps in Improving Primary School Students' English Speaking

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Abstract

By analyzing problems of primary school students' oral English learning and teaching in Nan Chong, China, this paper explores five advantages of cake English app, one of children's picture books reading apps, in enhancing students' oral English competence, applies vocabulary studying, vocabulary-pictures matching games, picture stories reading and blank filling tests in cake English app to the pre-speaking stage, the while-speaking stage and the post-speaking stage of primary English class and suggests ways of implementing cake English app in class, aiming at arousing students' interest in learning to speak English and then improving primary school students' oral English competence.

Key words: Cake English App; Children's picture books reading Apps; Primary English; Oral English learning competence

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INTRODUCTION

According to the physiological and psychological characteristics of Chinese primary school students, the aim of primary school English class is to arouse students' interest in learning English, to cultivate their positive attitudes towards English learning, to establish their self-

confidence, and to foster the sense of language and solid foundation of pronunciation and intonation. Students' further English studying is based on the ability to make communication in English in daily life. In addition, the ultimate goal of English teaching is to enable students to apply it to practical communication instead of talking on paper. However, in the large-numbered primary English speaking class, teachers have difficulty in distributing all students to practise speaking in class, hence the cultivation of primary school students' English speaking is relatively easy to be neglected intentionally or unintentionally at school. This paper analyzes problems in primary school students' oral English teaching and learning, probes into five advantages of cake English app, one of children's picture books reading Apps, applies it to the pre-speaking stage, the while-speaking stage and the post-speaking stage of primary English class and puts forward six suggestions in the implementation of cake English app. By means of cake English app, students' interest in learning to speak English is inspired and then their speaking ability can be greatly improved.

1. PROBLEMS OF ORAL ENGLISH LEARNING AND TEACHING IN PRIMARY CLASS

1.1 The Lack of Creativity in Teaching Approaches and Resources

The traditional teacher-centered teaching mode dominates most primary English classes in Nan Chong, where teachers give speeches while students just listen to teachers and take notes. To put it in other words, teachers either focus on the grammar, vocabulary and language points in class, or overly stick to the teaching materials, or design the situation according to their own preferences so that students are able to practise the special sentence patterns under the instruction of teachers. In this way, the

language input in oral English class is more than output and students have low passion for speaking English. Apart from it, in real communication, there are negative emotions such as embarrassment, tension and anxiety when students open their mouths. The more students are influenced by these negative emotions, the more unable they are to establish their self-confidence and passion, thus a vicious circle of not daring to speak English, namely dumb English, comes into being. .

1.2 The Limited Access to Authentic English

In most Nan Chong primary schools, there are not foreign teachers or qualified foreign teachers whom students have few chance to communicate with. To be precise, students have limited access to standard English pronunciation and authentic English environment.

Meanwhile, some Chinese English teachers are not good at pronunciation and intonation themselves. If students are incapable of imitating standard pronunciation and intonation as well as getting trained in the initial phonetic learning, they will spend more time and energy in correcting and relearning pronunciation and intonation in the later English speaking, thereby hindering the improvement of students' oral proficiency to some extent. In the meantime, students' poor pronunciation and intonation make them shy of speaking English in public and afraid of being laughed at by their peers. The more they dare not speak English, the less confident they are in oral English practice, the more embarrassed, tense and anxious they will get when speaking English (Zhou, 2012).

Therefore, living with people who always speak Chinese and learning from some teachers who have low oral proficiency have become major obstacles for students to improve their communicative competence in English.

2. CAKE ENGLISH APP: ONE OF CHILDREN'S PICTURE BOOKS READING APPS

The curriculum resources is one of key factors to help teachers and students achieve effective teaching and learning. As directors and instructors, teachers are supposed to utilize authentic and practical teaching materials and resources to serve effective teaching. Cake English app is one of Children's picture books reading apps, whose main function is to enable students from the kindergarten to the primary school to read and learn short stories under the guidance of teachers in class or by themselves at home. To be mentioned, there are pictures and voice which are easy for students to imitate and learn. And the stories are dubbed by qualified foreigners who speak standard English. Before signing up for cake English, students are required to take vocabulary tests. As a result, beginners are going to read and study stories

level 0. Those who have a command of more than 200 English words begin to read and learn stories level 1. Students with the vocabulary from 600-1000 start to study stories level 2. Those students with more than 1000 words, less than 1500 words learn to read stories level 3. Stories level 4 are suitable for students who have grasped more than 1500 words, less than 2200 words, while stories level 5 are fit for those who have commanded more than 2200 words. In a word, cake English stories consist of 6 levels, which are designed for children at different ages and with different English proficiency. In the learning process, there are also four steps for students to take. First, students follow the voice to read words and guess the meanings of vocabulary by means of pictures. Second, children play the game of matching vocabulary to pictures. Third, students take the step to read the picture stories, which are dubbed by standard English speakers. Finally, after reading stories, students are asked to take the three tests of blank-filling, which are designed for students level 1, level 2 and level 3. There are five major advantages, which are discussed as follows to illustrate that cake English app is able to stimulate students' interest in speaking and promoting their speaking proficiency.

2.1 Educational Appropriateness

As for kindergarten kids and primary school students, English textbooks, workbooks and exercises do not appeal to them, but stories with vivid pictures and voice benefit them from diversity and flexibility, for picture stories fall into 6 levels based on students' age and English proficiency, meanwhile words-pictures matching games designed in cake English app are capable of making students actively engage themselves in, through which students' learning interest is greatly aroused and their imagination is inspired. As concluded, picture books reading apps are applicable for mental characteristics of primary school students. To put it professionally, picture books reading apps possess the feature of educational appropriateness.

2.2 Creativity and Novelty

Creativity is the highlight of modern education, thus as the first and foremost education, primary English teaching in China requires creativity and novelty of teaching materials and approaches. It is concluded from class observation that primary school students feel bored by the unchanged textbooks and find it annoyed to finish workbooks and exercises. Instead, cake English app offers one short story and words-pictures matching game each day in order to keep students' sense of curiosity as well as to draw their interest in participating in playing games and learning English. By means of cake English app, primary school students not only gain fun and joy but also promote their English proficiency.

2.3 Operability

Along with the booming of new information technology,

learning cellphone apps are easy to be downloaded and then utilized anytime and anywhere. And students are exposed to authentic American or British pronunciation when reading picture stories, which indirectly supply an English environment to students' spoken language training. Furthermore, it is more conducive to correct students' phonetic errors by imitating the pronunciation of words and short sentences times and times until they make it. Therefore, students and teachers find it easy to make use of cake English app which is highly operable.

2.4 The Ease of Negative Emotion

Primary school students are prone to embarrassment, tension, anxiety, nervousness and other negative emotions when they have trouble in communicating with others or speaking English in public, which is called communication barriers. This is why students' oral English is generally lower than the expected teaching objectives. How to make students actively take part in practising speaking English, meanwhile how to make them avoid being influenced by such negative emotions? It has become a problem worthy of attention. In order to reduce students' burden of speaking English in front of teachers and peers, picture books reading apps give them the time and space to practise speaking English. To explain it, students will not worry about being laughed at when making mistakes, then gradually build up self-confidence and passion, consequently cultivate their autonomy in spoken English drills and communication with peers and teachers.

2.5 The Feature of Discourse

Primary school students' thinking pattern intend to be associated with pictures and images other than abstract thinking. Creating intuitive and vivid situations for teaching will attract students actively to participate in learning to speak, and to apply what they have learnt to real life communication. Cake English app combines pictures with stories, each picture showing a small vivid image of one situation, so that the role of students switches from being imitators to being participants. What's more, various types of situations are of great help to broaden students' horizon, to gain a deeper understanding of western culture, to respect culture differences as well as to learn English habitual expressions and discourses. Instead of learning the stereotyped dialogues and memorizing words and dialogues mechanically in the traditional classrooms, students learn to speak native language under different circumstances.

3. THE APPLICATION OF CAKE ENGLISH APP TO PRIMARY SCHOOL ORAL ENGLISH LEARNING AND TEACHING

Cake English App involving vocabulary studying,

vocabulary-pictures matching games, picture stories reading and blank-filling tests can be applied in the pre-speaking, the while-speaking and the post-speaking stage of primary English speaking class. Respectively saying, vocabulary studying is suitable for the pre-speaking stage. Vocabulary-pictures matching games can be implemented in the pre-speaking stage. Picture stories reading can be carried out in the while-speaking stage and the post-reading stage. Blank-filling tests are proper for the post-reading stage.

3.1 In the Pre-Speaking Stage

In the pre-speaking stage of the primary English speaking class, vocabulary studying plays an important role, for it makes preparation for practicing dialogues and speeches. Vocabulary related with the topic need to be learnt beforehand, if not, students carry the vocabulary which fail to convey their meanings when practicing communicating with peers or giving short speeches in class. To explain it, vocabulary studying is conducted in the pre-speaking stage in order to make students familiarize with words and phrases of speaking topics and materials, as well as activate their existed vocabulary and build up new vocabulary, thereby arousing students' interest in speaking and improving their speaking proficiency. Consequently, teachers ought to design and implement ways of teaching vocabulary associated with the teaching materials such as group discussion, recitation, brainstorming, semantic mapping and guessing. As for guessing, vocabulary studying in cake English app employs the method of guessing so as to stimulate students' interest in memorizing vocabulary while having fun. After guessing, students move to play vocabulary-pictures matching games to strengthen their memorizing. In the pre-speaking stage, teachers act as instructors who help increase students' vocabulary by means of vocabulary studying and vocabulary-pictures matching games in cake English app.

3.2 In the While-Speaking Stage

In the while-speaking stage, a couple of approaches can be carried out in order to make students achieve successful speaking. Picture stories reading in cake English app is one of these approaches. As it knows, speaking is an indispensable means of language output in EFL(English as a Foreign Language) learning, so is writing, while reading is the language input, so is listening. Since the language output and input are complementary to each other, if students are about to have a good command of speaking, they first need to enhance their reading and listening abilities. The more students read and listen to, the more likely they are to speak English smoothly and well. It is necessary for students to cultivate their reading capability while learning to speak English. Accordingly, picture stories reading in cake English app can be implemented in the while-speaking stage in class. What makes reading

different here is there are pictures and voice in these picture stories in cake English app, for primary school students find it easier to love reading stories with pictures and voice than love reading stories without them.

3.3 In the Post-Speaking Stage

In the post speaking stage of the traditional primary English class, such activities as making dialogues, giving speeches and making role play are designed by teachers to be conducted under the guidance of them. However, although teachers spend much time and energy in designing activities involving dialogues, speeches and role play, students may still refuse to engage themselves in these activities. It is concluded from class that there are two reasons for students' low participation. First, these kinds of activities are not systematically designed. If teachers are not required to make teaching plans collaboratively, they especially some inexperienced teachers will spend large amount of time and energy alone in designing teaching steps and activities which turn out to be unsystematic and fragmentary. Second, students' English proficiency, especially spoken English proficiency varies from one another, but the activities are not designed on the basis of different students' proficiency. As observed in class, students who are good at speaking English are more willing to take part in making dialogues, speeches and role play, while the students who are poor at their oral English worry about losing face in front of their peers and teachers, so that they either keep silence or are reluctant to participate in those activities. To solve these two above-mentioned problems in traditional primary English class, teachers can apply blank filling tests in cake English app which are systematically designed and fall into three levels to the post-speaking stage of primary English speaking class. While students are trying to fill the blanks, they are listening to and reading the story. If they are not satisfied with their scores or their speed at which they try to finish filling the blanks, they will try it again, which provides more chances for students to read and speak out the story. At the same time, they are not afraid of making mistakes, for the software will not laugh at them. Through practising, students are aware that they have become more familiar with the story than before and finally they are able to retell the story in their own words. Owing to the systematically-designed blank filling tests, teachers as instructors can spend more time in checking and giving feedbacks while students will gradually make progress in their spoken English.

3.4 Suggesting Ways of Implementing Cake English App

As it suggests, cake English app can be implemented in the pre-speaking, the while-speaking and the post-speaking stage of primary English speaking class. To better make use of cake English app, some suggestions need putting forward. The long-term implementation of cake English

app in unchanged ways will easily let students feel bored and lose interest. Therefore, teachers play an important part as instructors and helpers. There are six ways of the application of cake English app for primary English teachers. First, teachers are advised to take control of time students spend in utilizing cake English app in the pre-speaking, the while-speaking and the post-speaking stage flexibly. Second, only if cake English app is combined with other teaching approaches and activities, teachers can help students achieve decent speaking, which means cultivating students' speaking capability does not only depend on cake English app. Third, teachers are supposed to evaluate students' performances and give feedback on time. Although students' performances are recorded and evaluated by the software itself, without teachers' accurate evaluation, students make progress at a low speed, for primary school students are too young to be aware of their strengths and weaknesses of English learning and just follow the step to finish their assigned tasks every day. Fourth, it is essential to hold cake English story retelling competitions, speech contests and short story writing competitions in class once a month and in the middle term in order to keep students' passion for making use of cake English app and speaking English. Fifth, while employing cake English app in primary English speaking class, teachers need to reward the diligent and well-performed learners in class and encourage the students who do bad in speaking English. At last, since primary English class in Nan Chong features being large-numbered and students' English proficiency is different from one another, teachers ought to select the corresponding level of cake English for students in class and assign different tasks of cake English to students.

As long as teachers adopt these six ways of implementing cake English app, students will benefit from it and achieve speaking decent English.

CONCLUSION

Along with the rapid advance of information technology as well as the booming of economic globalization, it is of great necessity for people to have the ability to communicate in English, which demands for them to learn how to speak English. Since the age of 6-12 is called the key period of English studying (Ellis, 2008), primary school students are capable of learning to speak English well and making rapid progress. Thus it urges the reforming of the English speaking teaching approaches, which requires for the educators, especially the teacher, to keep pace with the times, and to make good use of the new technology such as apps on cellphones in the new media era and updated teaching resources and materials which serve to improve students' comprehensive English proficiency, particularly oral English proficiency. Without doubt, cake English app, one of children's picture

books reading apps, is beneficial for enhancing English speaking. Through the above analysis, it is feasible to apply the cake English app to strengthen primary school students' oral English proficiency. Simultaneously, it also conforms to the concept of enriching curriculum resources and expanding English learning channels. There are vocabulary studying, vocabulary-pictures matching games, picture stories reading and blank filling tests involved in cake English app, which are of great use to be applied in primary English class with the help of teachers and assigned to be after-class homework by teachers. However, there are still problems when cake English app is put into practice in class. For instance, teachers have trouble in evaluating all students' performances and assigning the corresponding tasks to students, which is a great challenge to teachers' computer knowledge and skills.

To sum up, cake English app, one of children's picture books reading apps is a new effective approach of inspiring students' interest and improving their English speaking competence.

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