

Application of FiF Oral Training App in College English Course——A Case Study in Southwest Petroleum University

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ABSTRACT. *Information technology has made great achievements in China and the world over the years. Diverse language learning apps are emerging in English classes. FiF Oral Training, a mobile app developed by iFLYTEK, was applied to College English course in Southwest Petroleum University (SWPU) since 2018. Through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, the research investigates 262 students of Grade 2018 in SWPU and analyzes the effect of FiF Oral Training on college English education. According to qualitative and quantitative analysis, poor English speaking environment and insufficient initiative are the main factors that affect college students' oral English learning. In addition, combining FiF Oral Training with college English teaching can promote traditional English teaching methods. Moreover, the app can improve the efficiency of oral English learning. By improving students' enthusiasm in oral English learning and persisting in online practice, positive learning effects can be achieved.*

KEYWORDS: *FiF Oral Training App; SWPU; Application ; College English course*

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

English, as an international language, is one of the tools for learning the world's advanced science and technology and plays a significant role in the international community today. For college students today, the ability to use English skillfully is an important criterion to test their professional skills (Shuang Lv, 2017)[1]. At the same time, information technology has made great progress in China and the world so that educators all over the world strive to combine information technology with education to better promote the development of education, improve the quality of teaching and accelerate the growth of education level (Aichan Xu, Qin Zou, 2016)[2]. Consequently, more information-based approaches are applied in college English teaching, such as mobile app, to assist classroom teaching, meet the needs of modern students, and increase the interactivity and autonomy of English teaching

(Xinjian Gao , 2017)[3].

FiF Oral Training APP, which was created by Beijing iFLYTEK Education Technology Co., Ltd. --- a joint venture dedicated to providing digital solutions and operating services for colleges and universities, is a multi-terminal oral training management system. It has rich oral training resources and sophisticated evaluation system. Although just published in 2016, it has been popularized in hundreds of colleges and universities in China, with more than millions of users. This AI-powered platform delivers users a centric, personalized and effective English learning experience accessible to anyone, anywhere, at anytime.

Facing the current situation of course hours cutting, various difficulties appear: students pay more attention to the intensive reading classes rather than the listening and speaking classes; the time of oral English study in class alone can no longer meet the actual oral English practice needs of students; the teacher cannot take care of every student with limited energy . In addition, when oral tests are carried out, because of the subjectivity of teachers, the oral examination score may not be objective enough. Southwest Petroleum University, a science and technology university in southwest China, has been using the system in College English course for non-English majors since 2018. To test its effect of its application, this research was carried out.

1.2 Theoretical Basis

The theory of second language acquisition is a study of the subject theory obtained from the second linguistic learning. In the field of second language acquisition, the theories of "input" and "output" have been paid much attention. Krashen, an American linguist, put forward the theory of language input in the early 1980s, which connected the theory of linguistics with the practice of language teaching and had a wide impact on the field of foreign language teaching (Wang Sumin, 2011)[4]. Krashen's "input" theory is too one-sided and challenged by Swain, who takes the children in the Canadian Immersive language teaching program as his research object and puts forward the "output" hypothesis based on his own observations. Language acquisition can be achieved through the output language, whether verbal or written. The proposed hypothesis aroused the concern of many domestic scholars and the exploration of the practical significance of this hypothesis started. Wen Qiufang put forward the "output drive hypothesis", the core idea is that the output is not only the driving force of language acquisition, but also the goal of language acquisition. In order for learners to successfully acquire language, it is not enough to rely merely on language input, but also to force learners to carry out a lot of language output training (Wen Qiufang, 2013)[5]. The mobilization of students' subjective initiative and the enrichment and creation of English output channels after class is also important.

Methodology and Procedures

In the study, quantitative (questionnaire) and qualitative (semi-structured interview) tools were used to collect relevant information about the application of FiF Oral Training in College English course and look for answers to the following questions:

What are the factors that affect college English students' oral English learning?

What is the status quo of the app's application in College English teaching in SWPU?

Does FiF Oral Training help college students in oral English learning?

How can FiF Oral Training be better integrated with College English teaching?

The research subjects of this study are the non-English major students of class 2018 who take College English course in SWPU. Through the SO JUMP platform in the form of electronic questionnaires, 262 copies of the questionnaires were collected. All valid questionnaires were used and calculated. With regard to the application of FiF Oral Training, 5 students from the College of Civil Engineering and Architecture, the College of Electrical Information, and the College of Materials Science and Engineering were interviewed to better understand their views and attitudes on the application of this app.

1. Results and Discussions

3.1 Results of the Questionnaire

3.1.1 Status Quo of the Use of FiF Oral Training in SWPU

Among the 262 participants, up to 99.62% use the app. The percentage reveals that an overwhelming majority of college students are utilizing mobile learning application to perfect their spoken English.

As to the use of the app, 86.25% of the students take the initiative to use the FiF Oral Training app for oral training in their spare time. 66.79% of the students use the app for 1-2 hours per week. 12.21% for 3-4 hours and 1.53% for 5-6 hours. It can be seen that in addition to completing the tasks assigned by the teacher, most students can use the app on their own initiatives to enhance their oral English when they are free. However, most students do not study long every week, and there is still a lot of room for improvement.

According to the comprehensive analysis, the students with a high score (more than 90 points) in oral English test at the end of the College English examination spend longer hours on online practice. Among the students whose grade is above 90 in the final oral test, 66.67% of them spend more than one hour on this app every week, and 30% spent more than three hours a week. In contrast, 40% of the students whose oral English scores are below 60 do not use this app frequently. Therefore, it

can be concluded that the duration of using FiF Oral Training app has a relative impact on oral English performance.

3.1.2 Factors Affecting Oral English Learning

According to the survey, lack of oral English learning environment is the most influential factor that 77.86% of the respondents choose. 69.08% of the students think that the lack of initiative in oral English learning is a major reason. 53.82% of the students think that the correct learning strategies are very essential. 51.15% of the students believe that self-confidence is also an important factor in oral learning. Only 29.01% of students believe that the lack of teacher guidance on oral English has a certain influence.

When it comes to the multiple choice question on their motivation, the results diverse from person to person. Among the 262 students surveyed, 74.05% are motivated to complete the homework assigned by the teacher. 72.52% are inspired by the desire to improve their oral English ability. 66.03% just use the app due to the final exam, and 51.67% are pushed by the oral English test of CET. It can be seen that in addition to the tasks assigned by the teacher, most of the students have a lot of different oral English practice needs, and have a certain amount of consciousness and enthusiasm for oral learning. Some students also provide some other reasons like making friends with foreigners and improving their ability of interpretation. Some also believe that the current social situation urges more and more companies to raise their employment requirement of English proficiency, especially oral ability, which in turn promotes their initiative of improving their spoken English.

Table 1 Application Effect of FiF Oral Training

	Totally Agree	Agree	Basically Agree	Disagree	Totally Disagree
This app is rich in content and diverse in subject	16.79%	34.35%	41.6%	4.96%	2.29%
This app can scientifically analyze the shortcomings of oral English and provide timely feedback	16.03%	35.5%	39.31%	7.25%	1.91%
This rating result of the app is accurate	9.16%	36.26%	43.13%	8.78%	2.67%
This app can correct my pronunciation	10.69%	41.6%	40.46%	5.73%	1.53%
This app can effectively improve my spoken English	11.45%	38.55%	44.27%	4.2%	1.53%
This app can attract me to do oral training	11.83%	32.06%	41.98%	11.07%	3.05%
This app can meet my needs for oral training	11.45%	38.17%	41.6%	7.25%	1.53%

3.1.3 Influencing Factors of Its Popularity

Among the influencing factors for the using of the app, pronunciation correction ranked first, accounting for 67.18%. Secondly, the experience of users (sensory experience, interactive experience and browsing experience) accounted for 65.27% in total. Thirdly, the network speed, personalized plan, diversity of training situation and interactive function accounted for 51.15%, 40.84%, 40.46% and 36.26% respectively.

It can be seen that the professional degree of pronunciation correction is the core competitiveness of this kind of app, which can influence students' choice of using it to a large scale. Intelligent voice scoring is the initial and most basic function of mobile apps for spoken English. Many apps have this function. Users follow the original pronunciation through speech recognition and other techniques, the system automatically scored for it, and marked the non-standard parts. In this way, one-to-one speech correction guidance can be provided to users in a targeted way, and users' accents can be effectively regulated (Matli W, 2013)[6]. This app has a relatively cutting-edge technology in the aspect of speech recognition technology. Through continuous enhancement and improvement of its accuracy, it compares and scores the user's recording and the original recording (Riyanto A, 2014)[7]. So this app can meet students' requirements for speech recognition evaluation.

3.1.4 Application Effect of FiF Oral Training

Through the survey, we can find that using this app in auxiliary teaching of college English received agreement from the majority of the users. They think this app does benefit their oral learning, and it can make up for the deficiencies which traditional oral English teaching can't accomplish.

As to the questions of the use of the app by college English teachers. Among the respondents, 98.09% say their College English teachers will use the FiF oral training app to arrange training tasks. Among them, 42.75% of the students indicate that their teacher often assigned oral practice tasks there, accounting for the highest proportion. 94.28% of the students admit that the college English teachers will regularly check the use of the app, and 77.86% of the students think that their college English teachers use the app to arrange assignments with proper amount of tasks. This shows that the college English course teacher can combine information technology with traditional classroom education in the teaching activities, and can appropriately use the app to arrange appropriate work and timely check the students' performance and provide them feedback, which can promote the oral English teaching.

The last question is an open question to collect the students' suggestions on the app. Most students put forward suggestions for the further improvement of the app scoring system, hoping to optimize the scoring system and refine the scoring feedback. Secondly, in terms of user experience, they hope to accelerate the network speed and reduce the phenomenon of system crash. Thirdly, some participants hope to enhance the interactive function, increase the fun and participation of this app, and develop more social communication functions. In the end, some students think that the tasks assigned by teachers are lack of pertinence, and some contents are

difficult for individual students.

3.2 Results of the Semi-structured Interviews

The semi-structured interviews mainly center on the 2 questions: Do you think it is conducive to oral English learning by combining FiF Oral Training with College English teaching? In your opinion, what are the problems of combining this app with College English course?

As for the first question, whether the combination of FiF Oral Training app and college English teaching is conducive to learning, the surveyed students generally say that it is necessary to add information technology and artificial intelligence technology in the teaching process. In the first place, this method stimulates students' interest to a great extent and weakens students' boredom of traditional classes. In addition, with the gradual popularization of digital mobile terminals, such a highly mobile and interactive learning mode is more in line with the learning habits of current college students. What's more, according to the comparison between the test scores of the interviewed students at the beginning of using the app and the scores of the recent assignments, most of the students' performance have been improved. Therefore, students' oral English level has been improved after using the app for one year.

Students also expressed their opinions on the application of the app in College English teaching. First, they believe that there are some problems with the popularity of mobile terminals. They said that learning effect is very dependent on students' initiative and consciousness of independent learning. For this open learning method, some students may not have enough self-control to restrain their learning behavior and cannot stick to it, thus greatly compromising the improvement effect of oral English. "It's a great resource, but I'm not self-disciplined." "If you keep learning, it will be effective." "You can make progress if you take it seriously." Therefore, students suggest that teachers should supervise the work and strengthen the supervision during the course of completing the homework after assigning extracurricular tasks, which may increase the time that students spend on app to improve oral English. Of course, they also put forward requirements for themselves, hoping that they can increase their enthusiasm for oral English learning, correct the attitude of oral English learning, and seriously treat courses and homework so as to improve oral English.

Secondly, students believe that there are still many areas for improvement in this app. Some students believe that there are recording defects in this app during recording. Sometimes the audio they record is not clear enough. Moreover, students have questions about the reasons for the scores. "We can be more detailed in the evaluation feedback, such as what is the reason for my low score. The pronunciation? Or the fluency? Or the intonation? And we hope it can be clearly marked." Another student said that when practicing, he hoped to pause in clauses instead of paragraphs. "It is very troublesome to have to read a word again from the beginning every time you mispronounce a word."

Some students think that using this app is not helpful for oral English learning. “I don't think it's different from other spoken language apps.” They said that in order to cope with the homework assigned by the teacher, some students used their roommates' mobile phones to play the original recording during the app test, so as to finish the homework and get high marks. They think that if we want to put an end to this phenomenon, we still need to make some improvements in the app itself and introduce an anti-cheating system to prevent these phenomena.

4. Implications

4.1 Implications for Students

The research indicates that FiF Oral Training app is rich in resources, diverse in topics and accurate in scoring, which has a positive effect on students' oral English learning, but the influence on students' learning effect depends on the frequency and duration of its use. Students should realize the importance of oral English learning, spend more time on oral English learning, correct learning attitude, and complete the task assigned by the teacher efficiently. Additionally, students should arouse the enthusiasm of oral English learning. They should encourage themselves to use the app more in their leisure time, effectively using the vast amount of resources provided in the app, such as IELTS spoken English, TOEFL spoken English, CET4&6 Model Test, TED speech, etc., so that they can study independently without the supervision of teachers and improve oral English learning consciousness autonomously. On top of that, students should enhance their confidence in spoken English and don not be afraid of speaking English. Setting up oral communication groups, participating in English corner activities frequently, establishing friendship with international students are all good methods to overcome the fear of oral English.

4.2 Implications for Individual Teachers

The use of FiF Oral Training app does assist College English teaching. On the one hand, it makes up for the lack of class hour and strengthen students' language learning motivation. On the other hand, it provides students full autonomy to arrange the learning content they are interested in. In teaching practice, teachers should conform to the trend of educational information, better combine the app with teaching, assign homework on time, timely supervise the students and offer feedback.

In terms of teaching content, teachers can select and add more self-design resources on the app, such as dialogue in famous films, TED speech and other resources. This can not only vigorously mobilize students' enthusiasm for learning, but also supplement the classroom teaching content. As to the teaching tasks, teachers can increase the amount of tasks appropriately on the basis of current situation. Through the constraint of learning tasks, teachers can exert pressure on students and enhance the frequency and duration of using the app so as to increase the amount of students' practice as well as their oral ability.

However, in order to avoid the transformation from autonomous learning to liberal learning, there should be a certain after-class supervision mechanism. First of all, teachers should design certain amount of weekly online exercises and plan specific but flexible learning method. Students can arrange their study time and schedule independently and complete the weekly study tasks. There is no limit to the number of times students can practice on their own. Second, establish small support groups. FiF Oral Training provides an online platform for voice communication. Users can set up groups based on their own needs and interests. Require students to engage in at least one topic discussion every week with the participation of a teacher, who can communicate by voice or text at any time on any question they encounter or on a topic of interest.

5. Conclusion

Through the study of the application of FiF Oral Training app to College English curriculum, it can be found that this application plays a positive role in improving students' oral learning efficiency and stimulating students' enthusiasm for oral English learning to some degree. Such innovative teaching method is feasible. It can improve the efficiency of oral English learning, enhance the interaction of oral English learning, and solve some problems existing in traditional teaching. However, we also have to admit that there are some weakness in this approach like inaccurate scoring system, insufficient interactive online communication, etc.. Also, the feasibility evidence for the use of this app in teaching is not sufficient, research data is not diverse and comprehensive, especially the scope of the study sample is limited. The results are not comprehensive enough.

This app does not violate the traditional theory of second language acquisition, but assists the realization of "input" and "output" theories. Through a wealth of resources and high-quality voice samples, this app not only improves the efficiency of "input", but also inspires students' subjective initiative, and the app can take advantage of students' time before and after class to increase students' opportunities for "self-output training", and rate students' voice through intelligent speech recognition system to help students correct their mistakes automatically. As long as it is used reasonably to cooperate with oral English teaching, its value and convenience are bound to be favored by students. It can both improve students' oral English and promote teachers' teaching to a certain extent.

From the perspective of "output", "speaking" is one of the key and difficult points in English acquisition. In traditional teaching, language input is more obvious, and the limitation of class time greatly reduces the opportunities for students to output training such as speaking. However, "FiF Oral Training App" can make use of the time before and after class to increase the opportunities for students to "output training". It can give full play to students' subjective initiative by providing a large number of resources. In Information Age today, College English teachers are supposed to equip themselves with innovative teaching method and apply proper teaching facilities to achieve great language output in College English teaching.

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