



App-Based Oral English Teaching and Primary Students Engagement in Classroom

Yiqi Huang and Panchit Longpradit*

Department of Education, Faculty of Social Science and Humanities, Mahidol University, Nakorn Pathom, Thailand

*Corresponding author, E-mail: panchit.lon@mahidol.ac.th

Abstract

English as an internationally common language occupies an important place in the Chinese education system, but the oral English teaching in Chinese basic education stage (from grade 3 to grade 6) is not fully implemented. The traditional way of oral English teaching, such as listening to audio recording and reading English dialogue, leads primary school students to negatively engage in classroom teaching, resulting in the poor success of oral English teaching. The purposes of this study were to design an App-based oral English teaching model to guide oral English teaching and to evaluate this teaching model in one Chinese primary school in Lizhou Area of Guangyuan City, Sichuan Province, in order to see this new way of teaching was possible in this context. This study investigated student engagement in three aspects: behavioral engagement, cognitive engagement, and emotional engagement in order to ascertain whether students actively engage in oral English class teaching guided by the proposed teaching model. The results revealed that overall the students had a positive engagement in the classroom teaching with the guidance of the App-based oral English teaching model. Hence, it can be concluded that the proposed teaching model could guide a more engaging oral English teaching, and allowed English teachers to design oral English classes with App to help improve students' classroom engagement.

Keywords: App, App-based oral English teaching model, oral English teaching, student engagement, primary school students

1. Introduction

In the era of globalization, economic cooperation and trade exchanges between countries are more closely and frequently. English, as a medium of international communication, is of great significance. English has long been one of the most important subjects in Chinese education; however, due to the examination-oriented education culture, oral English teaching has been in a relatively traditional form with low teaching effectiveness and low student engagement. In the actual English classroom teaching, because of the heavy teaching tasks and short teaching time, many Chinese English teachers devote most of their time and energy to vocabulary, reading, and grammar training related to examinations (Wang, 2019). The way of oral English teaching is monotonous and boring, and the learning atmosphere is too rigid and passive, which leads to the students' indifferent attitudes towards oral English and low participation in class (Guan, 2019). One research pointed out that students tend to show negative emotions, such as tension and anxiety, when they engage in oral English classroom activities (Xie et al., 2008).

The primary school stage is the best time for students to acquire oral English, and the senior grade (from grade 5 to grade 6) of primary school is the key two years of primary school learning because students have begun to have the ability of abstract logical thinking and can be more skilled in language learning methods (Chen, 2018). English teaching in primary schools, therefore, should focus on oral English teaching. However, the actual oral English classroom teaching in primary schools is still in a conventional way, such as audio recording, repeating, and then reading. Gradually, the monotonous classroom atmosphere makes students lose their interest in oral English, leading to their lack of enthusiasm to engage in the classroom. Besides, primary school teachers do not pay enough attention to oral English teaching (Zhang, 2018). Because oral English is excluded from entrance examinations for primary school students, the classes still focus on vocabulary and grammar teaching rather than oral training. In classroom teaching, students are usually passive listeners or negative participants who are unable to engage in classroom activities actively, and their passive engagement becomes one of the obstacles to their oral English acquisition (Xiao, 2011). Hence, Chinese English teachers need to change the traditional way of oral English teaching and to explore a brand-new method to help to improve the current situation of students' low engagement in the classroom.



The emergence and development of applications (from now on called “Apps”) meet demands of the change of traditional teaching and the exploration of a new teaching method. The combination of Apps and classroom teaching provides great benefits for oral English teaching. English Apps provide a large number of English learning and teaching resources, and vivid animation of Apps easily attracts students’ attention. A large number of oral English learning software provide a new way of thinking for the improvement of oral English teaching. They can make the learning content more interesting and motivating to provide a comfortable learning context for students (Zeng, 2013). As for the content, teachers can choose appropriate, interesting, and students’ favorite video clips to use in class, which does not only stimulates students’ passion for learning but also allows them to have a more intuitive understanding and grasp of semantics and language use. Using the App to organize interesting teaching activities helps to train students’ oral English and cultivate their teamwork spirit. The use of Apps in oral English teaching will certainly enhance students’ interest in oral English learning and encourage them to engage in classroom teaching (Yuan, 2018). Teachers thus should make full use of such innovative teaching resources from Apps, in order to improve the monotonous oral English teaching. If Apps are used in oral English teaching in primary schools, it will certainly decrease the traditional way of oral English teaching and improve students’ passive class engagement to a large extent.

This study, therefore, designed an App-based teaching model to be used in oral English teaching in primary schools and evaluated it in terms of the model’s impact on student engagement. This research studied three aspects of student engagement put forward by Kong (2003). These three aspects are behavioral engagement, cognitive engagement, and emotional engagement. Behavioral engagement means whether or not students’ behavior is positive in and out of class, including classroom performance such as concentration and response to teachers and extra-curricular participation that is time spent in learning out of class. Cognitive engagement refers to the learning strategies used by students in the process of classroom teaching, including low-level strategy of usually using mechanical learning methods, a high-level strategy based on intrinsic learning motivation, such as interest and curiosity, and dependency on teachers or other students. Emotional engagement refers to students’ emotional experience in classroom teaching, which consists of fun, sense of achievement, anxiety, and tiredness. By studying these, it is possible to measure and understand student engagement in oral English classroom teaching guided by the designed App-based oral English teaching model. The conceptual framework of this research was shown in Figure 1.



Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

2. Objectives

2.1 To design an App-based oral English teaching model.

2.2 To perform an empirical evaluation of the proposed model in terms of the model’s impact on student engagement.

3. Materials and Methods

This section mainly describes the participants and instruments employed in this research.

3.1 Participants

Purposive sampling was used to select the participants, which were sixth-grade students of one English class in a primary school in the Lizhou Area of Guangyuan City, Sichuan Province. This class consisted of was 51 students, including 20 girls and 31 boys.

3.2 Research Instrument

The first research instrument was the proposed App-based oral English teaching model, which was designed based on the analysis of the other two teaching models and literature about Apps used in oral English



teaching. In order to design a teaching model, the researcher first analyzed the constructivist teaching design model proposed by Yu with the help of Yang and He (2000) and BOPPPS teaching model (Wang et al., 2019), which is the theoretical basis of ISW (Instructional Skills Workshop), standing for bridge-in, objective, pre-assessment, participatory learning, post-assessment, and summary respectively. Then, based on examining the literature on the topic of App and oral English teaching, one innovation point was added, namely App selection, into the model, which was used to guide oral English classroom teaching.

The revision of the first draft of the model was based on a review by three primary school teachers. The process of the proposed teaching model was first described to three teachers and then asked them about the rationality of each step, namely App selection, App-based oral English resource platform, and teaching design. After that, suggestions for modification were given to finalize the teaching model. On the whole, the three teachers were all satisfied with these two steps of App selection and teaching design, but for the resource platform, two teachers deemed it required to be redesigned. Because the first draft design of the resource platform aimed for only a specific App, it needed to be modified to meet the needs of all kinds of Apps. Therefore, based on the experts' suggestions, the final teaching model could be pictured below:

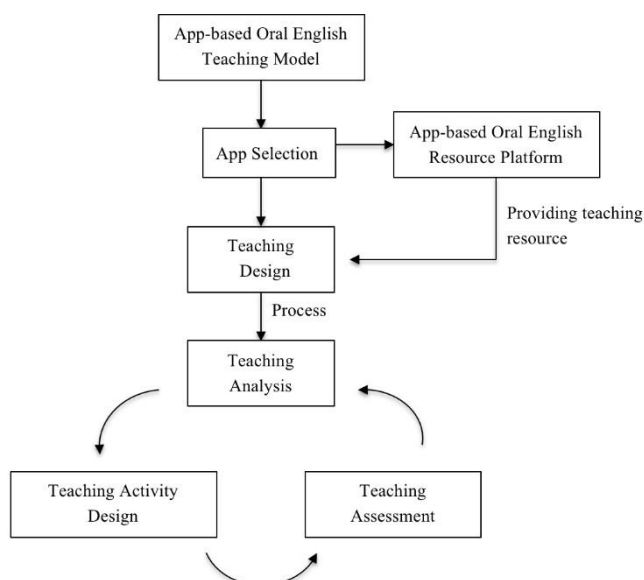


Figure 2 The App-Based Oral English Teaching Model

Another research instrument was the questionnaire that was originally created for this research and based on Kong's definition of student engagement (2003). A questionnaire was designed to study the degree of student engagement in the proposed App-based oral English teaching model in three dimensions: behavioral engagement, cognitive engagement, and emotional engagement. The questionnaire had three parts, nine components, and forty-five questions. In this regard, the 3-point Likert scale was used to score the questions. According to the scoring of a 3-point Likert scale, 1.00 to 1.66 equals bad, 1.67 to 2.33 equals undecided, and 2.34 to 3.00 equals good (Pimentel, 2019). The questionnaire of this research contained both negative and positive questions, so for the positive questions, the average of more than 2.33 out of 3.0 points in this study indicated that students actively engaged in classroom teaching. While for negative questions, the average of less than 1.67 out of 3.0 points meant active engagement.

4. Results and Discussion



The results of the research are divided into two parts: the first part was about the design of the teaching model, and the other part was the evaluation of student engagement in oral English classroom teaching under the guidance of the proposed teaching model.

4.1 The Process of the Designing Proposed App-Based Oral English Teaching Model

This teaching model consisted of three steps, namely App selection, App-based oral English resource platform, and teaching design. Details of each step were explained below.

4.1.1 App Selection

The first step was the App selection. Nowadays, there are many educational Apps with varying strengths and weaknesses, so it is extremely important to choose a reasonable and useful App for teaching; otherwise, teaching performance would be affected. The selection criteria of this step directly followed the three-tier evaluation system proposed by Song (2015), mainly including psychology, linguistics, and computer technology. Product placement was added to the third criteria based on the researcher's finding from the literature review that most Apps implant a large number of advertisements due to financial pressure from counterparts. These advertisements can waste students' time and interfere with their learning (Sun et al., 2019). During this stage, teachers can choose a suitable App as an educational tool for teaching from multiple oral English Apps by comparing specific selection criteria.

4.1.2 App-Based Oral English Resource Platform

The second step was the App-based oral English resource platform in order to guide teachers to select video clips from the App and to design courseware, which included the selected App platform and the PowerPoint presentation. To be specific, after choosing an App, the teachers first need to analyze the functions of App as to decide which functions to use, the classification of teaching resources, and video clips selected from which function. After the analysis, teaching video clips can be selected, and some principles should be followed when choosing video clips. Specifically, the teachers should select the video clips by those into consideration, including the difficulty of the teaching videos relevant to the textbook, the video content closing to students' daily life, the appropriate amount of teaching videos, and the suitable length of 1-2 minutes for each clip. Since the App can create learning groups, the teacher can use this function to organize after-class activities. After finishing the step of the selected App platform, the teachers can make the teaching PowerPoint that would be presenting video clips, key sentences, and the content of oral dialogue during the process of teaching.

4.1.3 Teaching Design

The third step was the teaching design, that is, to design the whole process of classroom teaching to help the teacher carry out oral English teaching by using the App. This step consisted of teaching analysis, teaching activity design, and teaching assessment. The components of teaching design could be pictured below.

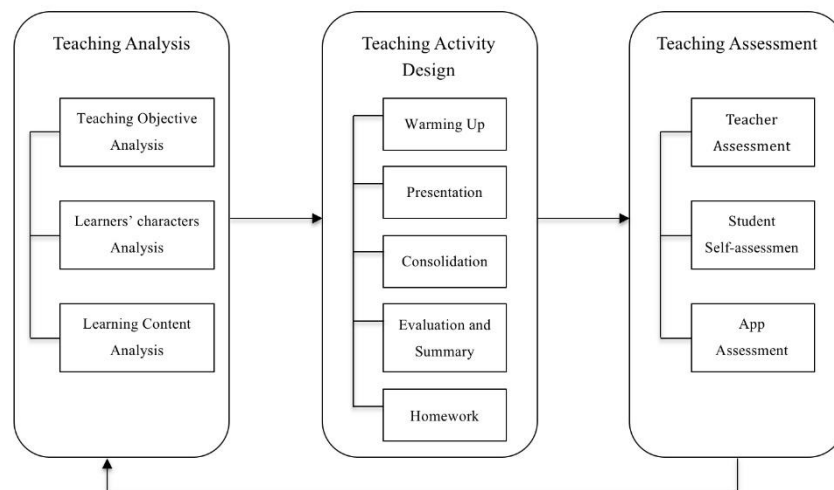


Figure 3 The Components of Teaching Design

Teaching analysis was made up of three parts: teaching objective analysis, learners' character analysis, and learning content analysis. Oral English teaching objective was determined from three aspects of knowledge target, talent target, and emotion target. Learners' character analysis referred to an analysis of students' traits of learning ability, emotional ability, a span of attention and others, and learning content was to state the name of the textbook, textbook settings, and teaching important points, teaching difficult points (Yuan, 2018).

After determining the teaching objective, learners' characters, and learning content, teaching activity could be designed from five steps of warming up, presentation, consolidation, evaluation, homework, and then carry them out in oral English classroom teaching.

There were three ways of teaching evaluation. Teacher assessment referred to teachers' comments on students' classroom activities (Li et al., 2017). Both student self-assessment and App assessment needed to be conducted after class. Students could upload their dubbing works to the learning group set up by the teachers and gave comments after listening to other students' dubbing works. App assessment was that after students completed a dubbing work, the App automatically scored them from fluency, accuracy, and completeness.

4.2 The Evaluation of Student Engagement in App-Based Oral English Classroom Teaching

An evaluation was performed based on an empirical method using the three aspects, namely, behavioral engagement, cognitive engagement, and emotional engagement. Overall, the results revealed that the students had a positive engagement in the classroom teaching guided by the App-based oral English teaching model. The following section showed the results of each type of engagement.

4.2.1 The Evaluation of Behavioral Engagement

In Table 1, the descriptive statistics of behavioral engagement, consisting of classroom performance and extra-curricular participation, were presented. The classroom performance comprised of 5 questions (Q1-Q5), and the extra-curriculum participation consisted of 5 questions from Q6 to Q10.

**Table 1** Behavioral Engagement of Students in Classroom Guided by App-Based Oral English Classroom Teaching Model (n=51)

Criteria	M	S.D.	Min	Max
Classroom performance	2.7490	0.31961	2.6471	2.8235
Extra-curricular participation	2.4471	0.39515	2.0980	2.6471

Note: 1.00-1.66=bad, 1.67-2.33=undecided, 2.34-3.00=good (Pimentel, 2019)

From the results of the statistical analysis presented in Table 1, it could be found that the overall level of behavioral engagement was quite good, with the average mean score of 2.7490 and 2.4471 for classroom performance and extra-curricular participation, respectively. At the same time, the engagement in the class was higher than that in extra-curricular time, illustrating that most students were less self-motivated enough after school because they tended to slack off in study without the supervision of teachers.

1) Classroom performance

The finding showed that the primary students were generally in a state of high active engagement in classroom teaching, because each item was more than the average of 2.5, and the mean of Q3, "I prefer to engage in discussions in this App-Based oral English class comparing to previous one," was the biggest value (M=2.8235). Because of the help of App, the oral English teaching had become activated and interesting, and this comfortable and lively learning environment could ignite students' ideas, making them more confident to express their thoughts in English. In comparison with the traditional way of oral English teaching that Chinese teachers ignore the activeness of teaching, and the boring class decreases students' interest in speaking English (Wang, 2019). Item Q1, "In an App-Based oral English class, I take the initiative to respond to the teacher's questions," with a mean of 2.6471, item Q2, "I participate actively in the activities with App organized by the teacher," a mean of 2.6863 and the mean value of Q4, "In App-Based oral English class, I can concentrate on listening to the teacher's lecture," was 2.7843. At the same time, the mean of item Q5, "I think the classroom atmosphere in App-Based oral English class is more active than the traditional one," was 2.8039, which was mainly because teachers only ask students to follow the textbook for oral practice in traditional teaching, which makes oral English teaching inactive (Zheng, 2020). On the contrary, in the App-based class, the teacher provided interesting teaching video clips, carried out corresponding teaching activities by using the App, so that the classroom teaching atmosphere was active.

2) Extra-curricular participation

The finding showed that the primary students were generally in a relatively high engagement in extra-curricular learning by using App. The average score of Q9 (M=2.6471), "I use the App to finish the homework assigned by the teacher," ranked the first, which was because the teacher assigned students to use App for English oral practice as a part of homework. On the contrary, the mean of Q7 (M=2.0980), "After class, I use App to compete oral English with classmates," was at the bottom, indicating that a large number of students in extra-curricular time did not use App to compete for their oral English skills with other students. The reason for this phenomenon possibly was related to personality, as most active students were more likely to have English oral competition observed by the researcher. Comparing item Q6, "I practice oral English at home by using App compared with the past," with a mean of 2.4902, which was the same as item Q8 that "I like to upload my oral works to the App." Yang (2019) mentioned that due to a large number of students in the class, it is difficult for teachers to take care of every student. In the limited time of teaching, some students fully express themselves, while others have no chance to speak. Therefore, the researcher used the App setting up a study group to encourage students to actively practice speaking after class and to upload their works to the App. In this way, all the students could have a chance to practice their oral English. Item Q10 (M=2.5098), "I spend extra-curricular time to understand the knowledge points of oral English that are not clear in the App-based English class," showed that most students had high self-awareness and also reflected that App could help them study knowledge points and improve their participation in extra-curricular activities.



4.2.2 The Evaluation of Cognitive Engagement

In Table 2, the descriptive statistics of cognitive engagement, consisting of low-level strategy, high-level strategy, and dependency, were presented. The low-level strategy comprised of 5 questions (Q11-Q15), the high-level strategy consisted of 5 questions from Q16 to Q20, and the dependency also included five questions between Q21 and Q25.

Table 2 Cognitive Engagement of Students in Classroom Guided by App-Based Oral English Classroom Teaching Model (n=51)

Criteria	M	S.D.	Min	Max
Low-level strategy	1.4078	0.41754	1.2941	1.6667
High-level strategy	2.7333	0.38297	2.7059	2.7451
Dependency	1.4745	0.44355	1.3333	1.7059

Note: 1.00-1.66=bad, 1.67-2.33=undecided, 2.34-3.00=good (Pimentel, 2019)

From the results of the statistical analysis indicated in Table 2, it could be found that the overall level of cognitive engagement was positive. Students could be independent in the App-based oral English classroom teaching, and they were more likely to use high-level strategies to acquire oral English rather than using low-level ones.

1) Low-level strategy

The results illustrated that the primary school students were not inclined to use the low-level strategy to engage in the oral English teaching model, because the mean score was 1.4078, which was below 1.67. Item Q13, "I understand the content of dialogue from App through rote memorization," and Q15, "I think that memorization is more important than a comprehensive understanding of spoken English," had the smallest means of 1.2941, indicating that they were more likely to gain spoken English by understanding instead of memorizing and also reflecting that App provides a good direction for students to understand spoken English. While the average value of Q12, "In the App-based oral English teaching class, I think that simply recording the key sentences from the slides is a good way to learn spoken English," was 1.6667, and nearly half of the students deemed that simply recording the key sentences provided by the teacher was a good way to learn spoken English. This phenomenon was caused by the long-term traditional education so that they were used to taking notes of teachers without thinking and selection.

2) High-level strategy

The results illustrated that the primary school students tended to use the high-level strategy to engage in the learning oral English because the mean score was high with 2.7333. The means of Q16, "I am curious about the teaching videos from the App before teacher present it," Q18, "I can understand what teachers teach and organized activities with App," and Q19, "Teacher's teaching videos chosen from App would help me connect spoken English with the real-life," shared the mean of 2.7451. In primary school oral English teaching, teachers cannot establish a close connection between teaching and real life, which makes oral English teaching and real-life seriously disconnected (Zheng, 2020). However, in an App-based oral English class, teachers took students' interests and real scenes into consideration when choosing video clips, which could help them to establish a connection between life and oral English, and gradually cultivated their in-depth learning strategies. Item Q20, "When learning new knowledge, the content of video clips chosen from App would help me associate with what I have learned before," with a mean of 2.7155 showed that using App to teach spoken English could help students learn deeply and strategically.

3) Dependency

The results of 1.4745 below 1.67 illustrated that the primary school students were relatively independent in the classroom teaching guided by the proposed App-based teaching model. The average values



of Q22, "In the App-based oral English class, I do not think positively about the teacher's questions, and waiting for the teacher to announce the answers," and Q23, "When participating in a group discussion or activities in the App-based oral English class, I do not think independently, but rely on other students in the group," were 1.4510 and 1.3333 respectively. More than half of the students were independent and actively thought about problems in class. After class, most students used App for English oral practice from Q25, "After class, I do not practice my oral English in the way that the teacher used in App-based oral English class," ($M=1.3529$). However, the mean value of Q21, "I do not preview the content about spoken English dialogue in the textbook" ($M=1.7059$), was higher than 1.66. Less than half of the students previewed the knowledge of the textbook so that teachers need to know why students were unwilling to preview.

4.2.3 The Evaluation of Emotional Engagement

In Table 3, the descriptive statistics of emotional engagement, consisting of fun, sense of achievement, anxiety, and tiredness, were presented. The fun comprised of 5 questions (Q26-Q30), the sense of achievement consisted of 5 questions (Q31-Q35), the anxiety included five questions (Q36-Q40), and the last five questions (Q41-Q45) belong to tiredness.

Table 3 Emotional Engagement of Students in Classroom Guided by App-Based Oral English Classroom Teaching Model ($n=51$)

Criteria	M	S.D.	Min	Max
Fun	2.8000	0.31241	2.7255	2.8824
Sense of achievement	2.7216	0.34428	2.6078	2.8431
Anxiety	1.4118	0.49382	1.2745	1.5686
Tiredness	1.2784	0.40611	1.2353	1.3529

Note: 1.00-1.66=bad, 1.67-2.33=undecided, 2.34-3.00=good (Pimentel, 2019)

From the results of the statistical analysis indicated in Table 3, it could be found that the overall level of emotional engagement was positive. Students felt fun and a sense of achievement to learn oral English in the App-based classroom teaching; at the same time, they did not become anxious and tired.

1) Fun

The finding showed that students were super fun when engaging in the App-based oral English teaching with a mean score of 2.8. Yuan (2018) used App in oral English teaching in primary schools and concluded that students felt a sense of fun in oral English classed taught by App higher than that in classes without App, which proved that this teaching method could effectively mobilize students' sense of fun in oral English learning. Item Q28, "I am interested in the dubbing video clips chosen from the App by the teacher," having a mean of 2.8824 indicated that learning materials in the App could stimulate their sense of fun. Item Q26, "The design of the slides based on App is very fun," and item Q30, "In the App-based oral English class, I feel very happy to acquire spoken English," had the same mean score of both 2.8039. The mean of item Q27, "I think the way teachers teach classes by using App is more interesting than the traditional way of teaching," was 2.7322. This finding could be attributed to the positive and active classroom atmosphere.

2) Sense of achievement

The finding showed that students had a high sense of achievement when engaging in App-based oral English teaching with a mean of 2.7216. Item Q34, "The teacher's way of teaching by using App let me speak more fluent English sentences," had the highest average of 2.8431. Item Q35, "I finish the oral English homework assigned by the teacher more smoothly than before," with the mean of 2.8039, and item 33, "I



have a great sense of accomplishment in answering the questions from English teacher in the App-based oral English class,” with a mean of 2.7255. The average value of Q31, “I have a great sense of achievement in using the dubbing function of App to complete oral dialogues in class,” was 2.6275 and that of Q32, “I feel very successful in participating in dubbing competitions, group discussions and other activities with App,” was 2.6078. Many primary school students felt that they could not speak spoken English well and were afraid of being laughed at by other students when speaking English, so they dared not open their mouths and lacked confidence (Zhao, 2019). Video clips in the App have authentic pronunciation, so students could correct their pronunciation and speed of speech through practice by using App. At the same time, they could speak English more fluently through the group activities organized by the teacher to improve their confidence in speaking English.

3) Anxiety

The results demonstrated that the primary school students were not anxious when engaging in App-based oral English classroom teaching because the mean score was 1.4118 less than 1.67. Item Q38, “I do feel anxious before the App-based oral English class beginning,” with the mean of 1.2745. The means of Q39, “Although the teacher uses App to teach oral English, I still feel anxious to speak English because of my poor English pronunciation and lack of fluency,” and that of Q40, “The teacher’s way of teaching by using App is different from the traditional way, and I am very worried if I do not understand,” shared with 1.4314. It meant more than half of students did not feel nervous about their English pronunciation and fluency, because the App could correct their pronunciation and improve fluency. Adopting the way of App teaching was different from the traditional way, but there were no students misunderstanding this way of teaching, in that teachers could reasonably design oral English teaching activities combined with App. Item Q37, “Although the teacher uses App to teach oral English, I do speak English as tense and anxious as I used to,” received the mean score of 1.3529 and Q36, “In the App-based oral English class, I would be nervous or anxious to engage in dubbing activities or discussion,” obtained the mean score of 1.5686. Those two items meant that students did not think they were anxious when they speak English (Q37), and they also did not feel the anxiety to do activities (Q36).

4) Tiredness

As displayed in Table 3, primary school students were not tired when learning in App-based oral English classroom teaching, because the mean score was 1.2784, which is far below 1.67. The lowest mean was Q44, “I sometimes feel tired when the teacher plays the teaching video clips chosen from App,” ($M=1.2353$), and four out of five students were not bored with the teacher’s teaching video clips. The clips were so interesting that the students even eagerly expected the teacher to play them observed by the researcher in the class. Item Q42, “The slides based on App designed by the teacher makes me aesthetically tired,” and Q43, “I am tired of the teacher’s way of teaching oral English by using App,” shared the mean of 1.2745. Item Q45, “I am tired of the atmosphere of the App-based oral English class,” received a mean of 1.2549 and Item Q41, “Although the teacher uses App to teach oral English, I am still tired of learning oral English,” received the mean score of 1.3529.

To sum up, it was clear that the proposed teaching model could be used to conduct oral English classroom teaching, and with its guidance, student engagement was positive.

5. Conclusion

This research has proposed a teaching model for oral English teaching in primary schools and presented its evaluation results. The researcher selected Apps and video clips, presented PowerPoint and designed teaching plans in strict accordance with the steps of the teaching model, and then combined English textbooks for teaching practice. After the teaching, the model was evaluated in terms of its effects on student engagement employing a questionnaire. The results revealed that overall the students had a positive engagement in the classroom teaching with the guidance of the App-based oral English teaching model. Hence, it can be concluded that the proposed teaching model could guide to enhance oral English teaching, and allowed English teachers to design oral English classes with App in a bid to improve students’ classroom engagement.



Although it was verified that the proposed teaching model could be better used to conduct oral English classroom teaching and with its guidance, student engagement was positive in class, while the research participants were limited. Therefore, the future study can increase the number of research participants, not only to primary school students but also to middle school students or college students to improve the validity of experimental data and to prove the applicability and usefulness of the proposed model. Furthermore, since the study was conducted in an urban primary school and did not involve rural primary schools, the study area for future study can be extended to rural areas.

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