

Evaluating English Learning Apps for Chinese Preschoolers

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Digital technologies like English learning apps have been receiving steadily growing attention in research on educational technology. Yet, few studies have considered the evaluation of English learning apps for preschoolers as foreign language learners. This project examines the extent to which the design of two popular English learning apps for young children in China, *iHuman ABC* and *Khan Academy Kids*, and discourses around them reflect research evidence on how young children learn English. Adopting a critical multimodal approach to studying semiotic software (Djonov & Van Leeuwen, 2018), we employ multimodal discourse analysis to examine how the two apps present English learning content and thematic analysis to explore how stakeholders (i.e., parents and teachers) evaluate them. Our data comprise the apps themselves, user reviews and semi-structured interviews with 10 English teachers in Chinese private preschools. Our findings reveal that the apps target different English language skills and associated competence levels, suggesting that *iHuman* is more oriented toward *language* teaching and appropriate for Chinese preschoolers, while *Khan* aligns more with *literacy* teaching. Teachers commented on this difference, while no such awareness is evident in the user reviews, which might have consequences for Chinese preschoolers. This study contributes to evaluative studies of English learning apps for preschoolers by analysing both the apps and stakeholders' discourses around them.

References

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Bio

Rongle Tan is a PhD candidate in the School of Education at Macquarie University. His research interests include social semiotics, critical and multimodal discourse analysis, multiliteracies, and educational technology. His recent work has been published in *Learning, Media & Technology*, *Discourse & Communication*, and *Discourse Studies*.