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Research on educational game design for children's tea culture learning

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Abstract

With the continuous development of contemporary educational approaches, educational games have increasingly been adopted as an emerging pedagogical medium in children's education. This study aims to design and preliminarily validate an educational game focused on tea etiquette education for children aged 7-12, with the goal of supporting their learning of Chinese tea culture and fostering cultural identification. Drawing on children's cognitive characteristics and learning interests, the study proposes a design model for tea-culture educational games that integrates task-driven learning, interaction feedback, and culturally situated scenarios. First, tea etiquette knowledge appropriate for children was extracted through a literature review and expert interviews and then transformed into game tasks and interactive content. Second, a mobile game prototype entitled Tea Etiquette Quest was developed, incorporating modules for tea-set recognition, serving tea, tea-drinking behavior, and social interaction at a tea table. Finally, the prototype was evaluated through children's playtesting, semantic differential scales, and brief interviews. The findings indicate that task-

driven activities, timely feedback, and culturally embedded scenarios can enhance children's interest in learning, support their understanding of tea etiquette, and improve the perceived effectiveness of cultural knowledge acquisition. This study provides a design-oriented framework for transforming traditional cultural knowledge into child-centered educational game experiences and offers practical implications for the application of educational games in traditional culture education.

Keywords: children's education, tea culture, tea etiquette, educational game, game-based learning, interaction design

1. Introduction

Against the backdrop of globalization and rapid sociocultural change, traditional Chinese cultural education faces dual challenges: sustaining cultural heritage and ensuring child-centered reception. Traditional culture serves as a cohesive force for national identity and ethnic solidarity, and childhood represents a critical period for cultural formation (Yang & Zeng, 2022). Tea culture, with its rich ethical connotations and etiquette values, provides an ideal vehicle for children's traditional culture learning (Zhang, 2024). However, current education often prioritizes form over substance and transmission over child-centered perspectives (He & Wang, 2021). Existing tea culture education relies heavily on classroom instruction, club demonstrations, or short-term experiential activities, resulting in fragmented content, insufficient interactivity, and limited child agency. Such content is disconnected from children's daily lives and psychological characteristics, failing to sustain continuous learning interest (Zhang, 2019).

Educational games embed learning objectives within tasks, scenarios, and feedback mechanisms, converting abstract knowledge into observable, operable, and repeatable behavioral processes (Chen & An, 2024). For children aged 7-12 , object recognition, role imitation, rule sequencing, and immediate rewards align with their developmental cognitive traits. Transforming tea etiquette knowledge into a mobile educational game therefore enhances learning enjoyment while enabling children to practice courtesy, respect for elders, and communal interaction in virtual tea ceremony settings.

This study addresses three research questions. First, what kinds of tea etiquette knowledge are

suitable for children aged 7-12 ? Second, how can such knowledge be transformed from textual descriptions into game tasks, role interactions, and immediate feedback? Third, can the resulting game prototype receive positive evaluations in terms of learning interest, operational experience, and cultural cognition? By addressing these questions, the study seeks to shift traditional culture education from lecture-based knowledge transmission toward experiential behavioral learning and to provide design evidence for children's cultural education products in the field of interaction design.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Research on Tea Etiquette Culture Education

Tea etiquette is an important component of tea culture. It encompasses preparing utensils, making tea, serving tea, inviting others to drink, refilling tea, tasting tea, and communicating at the tea table (Yang, 2016). Tea etiquette is not merely a sequence of drinking procedures; it is also an integrated expression of ethical relationships, social order, and aesthetic life. In children's education, tea etiquette can be translated into concrete behaviors such as respecting elders, receiving guests politely, drinking quietly, and sharing with others. It therefore has considerable potential for transfer to everyday life.

Existing forms of children's tea culture education include school-based courses, museum visits, summer camps, family tea-art activities, and online courses. Although these forms contribute to cultural dissemination, they also have limitations. Classroom teaching often emphasizes the introduction of knowledge while lacking hands-on experience (Chiba, 2022). Museum - based and immersive activities are constrained by venues, instructors, and costs, making regular implementation difficult (Korani & Mirdavoudi, 2022). Online courses are convenient but may weaken emotional interaction (Wang, 2022). These limitations suggest that tea etiquette education for children requires a lighter, repeatable, highly interactive, and easily assessable learning medium.

In terms of content characteristics, tea etiquette should not be presented to children primarily through lengthy historical narratives or abstract explanations. Instead, it should be translated into objects, actions, and social relationships that children can perceive and enact. For example, the convention of filling a cup to approximately 70% can be represented through a visual height cue; the principle of serving elders first can be transformed into a character-sequencing task; and polite responses can be practiced through dialogue choices. Such

transformations preserve the cultural meaning of tea etiquette while reducing children's cognitive burden.

2.2 Research on Educational Games

Educational games embed learning content within game experiences through goals, rules, challenges, feedback, and narrative mechanisms (Xu et al., 2024). They have been widely used in children's cognitive training, language learning, and cultural education. Theories of gamified learning suggest that task challenges, immediate feedback, point-based rewards, and achievement systems can enhance learning motivation (Deterding et al., 2011). For child learners, operational feedback and contextual participation can reduce the difficulty of understanding abstract knowledge and consolidate behavioral rules through repeated practice.

Existing research on educational games has focused on design models, learning motivation, and effectiveness evaluation (Wang & Chen, 2018). However, culture-oriented educational games still face a tension between display and experience and between entertainment and learning (He & Wang, 2021). On the one hand, traditional cultural content is historically rich, and direct presentation through textual knowledge may increase children's cognitive load. On the other hand, an excessive pursuit of entertainment may weaken cultural meaning. Therefore, educational game design needs to balance knowledge accuracy, task playability, and value guidance.

From an interaction design perspective, the value of educational games lies not only in visual appeal but also in the structured arrangement of learning pathways. Clear goals help children understand why they are acting; visible feedback helps them understand how well they are performing; and appropriate rewards encourage them to continue learning. Therefore, this study incorporates task structure, feedback immediacy, and reflective elements into the design, rather than treating points and badges as the entirety of gamification.

2.3 Research on the Game-Based Transformation of Knowledge

Transforming knowledge into a game-based form does not mean simply placing text on a game interface. Rather, it requires decomposing knowledge into operable tasks, perceivable objects, and feedback-driven behaviors. Multimedia learning theory suggests that an appropriate combination of images, text, and interactive operations can support children's understanding of complex concepts (Mayer et al., 2005). Sociocultural learning theory emphasizes the role of context and interaction in cognitive development (Vygotsky, 1978), which provides theoretical support for tea-table role play and dialogue-based interaction.

In relation to tea etiquette, this study adopts a three-level experiential pathway consisting of the visceral, behavioral, and reflective levels (Hassenzahl et al., 2010). At the visceral level, tea utensils such as teapots, cups, and saucers are transformed into draggable, matchable, and recognizable objects. At the behavioral level, norms such as serving tea with both hands, following age-based order, and drinking quietly are translated into sequencing, judgment, and simulation tasks. At the reflective level, values such as respect, polite communication, and cultural identity are expressed through character feedback, badge rewards, and reflective quizzes. This pathway enables children to acquire knowledge, behavioral rules, and affective values simultaneously while completing game tasks.

Piaget's theory of cognitive development indicates that children's cognitive abilities develop gradually with age and that developmental stages shape how children understand and learn (Piaget, 1971). Children aged 7-12 are generally in the concrete operational stage: they can understand classification, sequence, and causality, but their understanding of abstract symbolic meaning still depends on concrete contexts. Therefore, the game should avoid presenting excessive terminology or lengthy explanations at one time. Instead, it should provide multichannel prompts through short sentences, icons, voice guidance, and demonstrative actions.

2.4 Summary of the Literature

In summary, previous studies have demonstrated the value of educational games in enhancing children's learning interest and participation, while tea etiquette education has been recognized as appropriate for children's traditional culture education. However, existing research has rarely proposed a continuous pathway for tea etiquette that links knowledge text construction, needs analysis, component selection, prototype development, and validation. The present study therefore positions itself at the intersection of children's cognitive development, tea etiquette behavior training, interaction design, and game-based learning. It emphasizes knowledge adaptation, task design, and replicable validation methods as the basis for future full-scale system development.

3. Research Methods

3.1 Research Framework and Process

This study adopted a mixed-methods pathway comprising literature review, expert interviews,

needs analysis, model construction, prototype design, and validation feedback. First, literature analysis was used to extract tea etiquette knowledge that children could understand. Second, experts in tea culture and children's education were invited to assess the age appropriateness of the knowledge text. Third, questionnaires and observations were used to identify preferences for learning modes. Finally, the knowledge points were transformed into game tasks, interaction mechanisms, and interface prototypes, which were preliminarily evaluated through a semantic differential scale and brief interviews.

3.2 Construction of Children's Tea Etiquette Knowledge Text

The construction of the knowledge text followed four principles: accuracy, age appropriateness, operability, and game-transformability. During the literature screening stage, databases such as CNKI, Google Scholar, and Wanfang Data were searched for studies related to tea culture and children's education. Content that was close to children's everyday experience and could be represented through actions or objects was retained, while abstract historical narratives and complex tea philosophy were deemphasized.

To ensure that the initial knowledge text was appropriate in terms of educational value, cultural inheritance, and child adaptability, semi-structured expert interviews were conducted. The interviews focused on whether the knowledge points were suitable for children aged 7-12, whether they could be transformed into interactive tasks, and whether they reflected the core values of tea etiquette. Based on expert feedback, tea etiquette knowledge was organized into four dimensions: tea-set use, tea-serving etiquette, tea-drinking behavior, and tea-table social interaction. Abstract expressions such as the spirit of the tea ceremony were translated into behavioral language, such as respecting others, sharing joy, and responding politely.

During coding, descriptions of etiquette in the literature were decomposed into four types of units: objects, actions, rules, and meanings. Each unit was then evaluated for its potential to be visualized, sequenced, and supported by feedback. Historical background that could not be directly transformed was reserved for supplementary explanation by teachers or parents rather than included in the children's main tasks. Transformable content entered the game knowledge base and was matched with corresponding forms of interaction.

3.3 Needs Analysis for Children's Tea Culture Learning Through Educational Games

The needs analysis included questionnaires administered to professionals and observations of children's playtesting. The questionnaire targeted primary school teachers, children's education researchers, and tea culture practitioners. A five-point Likert scale was used to

evaluate the suitability of mechanisms such as task challenges, role play, interaction feedback, animated demonstrations, and balance between entertainment and learning. Children's observations focused on interface recognition, task comprehension, task completion, and emotional responses. Descriptive statistics were combined with observation notes to identify points of interest and sources of difficulty.

The questionnaire items addressed five types of needs: whether the learning content was suitable for children, whether the task format was attractive, whether feedback was clear, whether role-based scenarios were easy to understand, and whether entertainment and learning outcomes were balanced. Observation records focused on behavioral indicators such as pauses, mis-taps, repeated clicks, active questions, and emotional expressions, thereby avoiding reliance solely on adult judgments of children's experiences.

3.4 Educational Game Design and Validation

The game design was organized around the visceral, behavioral, and reflective levels. The visceral level emphasized cartoon-style visuals, bright colors, lightweight sound effects, and low-threshold operations. The behavioral level emphasized task decomposition, progressive difficulty, and immediate error correction. The reflective level used badges, knowledge quizzes, and scenario summaries to encourage children to understand the meaning of etiquette. For validation, and in reference to expert feedback, the study adopted a semantic differential scale to measure children's experiences across dimensions such as interesting-boring, clear-unclear, smooth-lagging, easy to complete-difficult to complete and substantial gain-little gain. Brief interviews were used to supplement and interpret the quantitative results.

4. Research Results

4.1 Result of Children's Tea Etiquette Knowledge Text Construction

The results indicate that tea etiquette content suitable for children should prioritize concrete, short-process, and feedback-oriented knowledge. Tea-set use focuses on the names and functions of teapots, cups, and saucers. Tea-serving etiquette focuses on serving tea with both hands, serving elders first, bowing slightly, and using polite expressions. Tea-drinking behavior focuses on handling utensils gently, sipping quietly, and not interrupting others. Tea-table social interaction focuses on inviting, responding, taking turns, and sharing. Tea-set use and tea-serving etiquette are suitable as initial levels because they involve clear objects and

sequencing rules, whereas tea-drinking behavior and tea-table social interaction are more appropriate as advanced levels because they require contextual judgment.

Table 1 Children's Tea Etiquette Knowledge Text and Game-Based Transformation

Dimension	Core knowledge point	Cognitive fit for children	Game-based transformation
Tea-set use etiquette	Recognition and classification of tea utensils	Concrete objects are easy to identify and suitable for image-based memory	Drag-and-drop matching, image selection and error prompts
Tea-serving etiquette	Serving order, especially serving elders first	The rule of sequence is clear and can be learned through role imitation	Sequencing tasks, character demonstration and contextual feedback
Tea-drinking behavior etiquette	Quiet sipping without making noise	Behavioral norms are concrete and easy to judge as correct or incorrect	Behavior selection, animated demonstration and correctness feedback
Tea-table social etiquette	Language for inviting others to drink tea	Simulated social contexts are close to family and school experiences	Dialogue choices, task challenges and badge rewards

*Note.*craeted by the author

4.2 Results of Educational Game Component Selection for Children's Tea Etiquette

The study selected task challenges, role play, scenario-based dialogue, immediate feedback, reward systems, and progressive levels as the core game components. Task challenges decompose the steps of tea etiquette. Role play establishes the social context of host, guest, and elder. Immediate feedback helps children understand whether an operation is correct, while reward systems sustain learning motivation. Compared with pure knowledge quizzes, these components better reflect the behavioral and interactive nature of tea etiquette.

Table 2 Framework for Educational Game Component Selection

Game component	Design purpose	Corresponding tea etiquette content	Feedback form
Task challenges	To divide knowledge into achievable steps	Tea-set recognition and tea-serving sequencing	Progress bars and star ratings

Role play	To establish host, guest, and elder relationships	Serving tea, inviting others, and responding	Verbal feedback from virtual characters
Scenario-based dialogue	To train polite expression and social judgment	Inviting others to drink tea and expressing thanks	Prompting correct sentence patterns
Immediate feedback	To reduce the cost of errors and support correction	Action sequence and tea-set selection	Colors, sound effects, and animations
Reward system	To maintain learning interest and achievement	Completing levels and knowledge quizzes	Badges, titles, and points

Note.craeted by the author

4.3 Results of Needs Analysis for Children's Tea Etiquette Educational Game

The needs analysis was based on questionnaire data from 150 relevant practitioners. The results show that respondents generally recognized the role of game-based learning in enhancing children's interest in tea etiquette. Among the items, the mean score for the belief that game-based learning enhances interest was the highest (M = 4.05). Interaction feedback and the balance between entertainment and learning both obtained mean scores of 3.85, and task challenges obtained a mean score of 3.75. These results indicate that learners and education-related professionals tend to accept task-based and feedback-based learning modes. Role play scored 3.55, which was still positive overall but showed greater individual variation, suggesting that clearer scenario guidance should be provided to prevent children from experiencing confusion about role relationships.

Table 3 Main Results of the Needs Analysis Questionnaire

Evaluation item	Mean	Design interpretation	Optimization direction
Task challenges as a learning mode	3.75	Children can accept level-based learning	Increase task difficulty progressively
Role play as a learning mode	3.55	Children show interest, but individual differences exist	Strengthen scenario explanation and role cues

Interaction feedback as a learning mode	3.85	Feedback helps sustain motivation	Add visual, auditory, and gentle corrective feedback
Game-based learning enhances interest	4.05	The game format is attractive	Balance entertainment with learning goals
Entertainment and learning outcomes should be balanced	3.85	Learning should not be replaced by play alone	Add knowledge quizzes and reflective summaries

Note.craeted by the author

4.4 Design and Validation

Based on the needs analysis, the study developed a design chain consisting of knowledge extraction, task transformation, interaction feedback, and scenario reflection. Tea-set recognition was designed as a drag-and-drop matching task; the tea-serving process was designed as a sequencing and character demonstration task; tea-drinking norms were designed as behavioral judgment tasks; and tea-table social interaction was designed as a dialogue-choice task. Preliminary validation suggests that children can more easily understand etiquette knowledge when it is presented through actions and roles. Visual prompts and positive feedback can reduce anxiety about failure. However, for younger children, multi-step tasks should be further decomposed, and text prompts should be supplemented with voice or icons.

In applying the model, the study emphasizes the educational tone of feedback. Children should not receive punitive evaluations after incorrect operations; instead, they should see explanatory prompts such as Try again or It is more polite to serve the elder first. Feedback therefore not only indicates correctness but also explains the reasons behind etiquette, transforming game feedback into value guidance.

5. Prototype Development and Validation

5.1 Overview of Prototype Development

The game prototype developed in this study was named Tea Etiquette Quest. It is positioned as a mobile educational game for children aged 7-12. The prototype was designed in Figma and included a launch page, task selection page, scenario guidance page, interactive task page, feedback and reward page, and learning summary page. The overall visual style used soft tea-

colored tones and cartoon-style tea-room elements. Interaction was based mainly on tapping, dragging, sequencing, and selecting, thereby avoiding complex gestures. The prototype content was organized around four modules: tea-set use, tea-serving etiquette, tea-drinking behavior, and tea-table social interaction.

5.2 Core Module Demonstration and Explanation

The core module, Tea-Serving Etiquette, uses a family tea-table scenario in which the child plays the role of a young host. Under the guidance of a virtual tutor, the child completes five steps: preparing the cup, selecting the recipient, serving tea with both hands, using polite expressions, and receiving feedback. The interface includes the launch page, module selection, scenario guidance, task interaction, and feedback rewards. Each step provides icons, short text, and animated prompts. If the sequence is correct, the character offers encouragement and a badge is activated; if the operation is incorrect, the system provides a gentle prompt and guides the child to try again.

The prototype also includes a tea-set recognition module that guides children to drag the teapot, cup, and saucer to the correct positions; a tea-drinking behavior module that asks children to select appropriate sitting postures and drinking behaviors in specific scenarios; and a tea-table social interaction module that trains invitations, thanks, and responses through dialogue choices. Together, these modules form a learning pathway from simple recognition to complex social interaction, aligning with children's cognitive progression from concrete operation to rule understanding.

（a）Launch page（b）Task selection（c）Scenario guidance（d）Etiquette explanation

（e）Tea-set interaction（f）Task interaction（g）Reward feedback

Figure 1 *Prototype Interfaces of Tea Etiquette Quest*

Note.craeted by the author

5.3 Validation Process and Method Design

The validation stage aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of the prototype in supporting children's learning of tea etiquette. Thirty children aged 7-12 participated in playtesting after informed consent was obtained from their guardians. The procedure included operation instructions, free warm-up, completion of assigned tasks, completion of an SD scale, and brief interviews. The SD scale used a five-point scoring range from -2 to 2 and included five semantic pairs: boring-interesting, unable-able, little gain-substantial gain, delayed-timely, and lagging-smooth.

Table 4 Design of the Semantic Differential Scale

Dimension	Item	Rating scale
Learning interest	Children's level of interest in the game	Boring -2 -1 0 1 2 Interesting
Task completion	Whether children can successfully complete the game tasks	Unable -2 -1 0 1 2 Able
Cultural cognition improvement	The degree to which children gain cultural knowledge through the game	Little gain -2 -1 0 1 2 Substantial gain
Effectiveness of interaction feedback	The extent to which game feedback supports children's learning process	Delayed -2 -1 0 1 2 Timely
Comfort	Children's perceived comfort with the interactive	Lagging -2 -1 0 1 2 Smooth

	interface	

*Note.*craeted by the author

Pearson correlation analysis showed that learning interest was significantly and positively associated with cultural cognition improvement（$r = 0.623$, $p < 0.01$）and the effectiveness of interaction feedback （$r = 0.482$, $p < 0.01$）.Task completion was also significantly associated with interaction feedback effectiveness（$r = 0.472$, $p < 0.01$）, indicating that clearer immediate feedback made it easier for children to complete tasks. Cultural cognition improvement was positively associated with interaction feedback effectiveness（$r = 0.446$, $p < 0.05$）and comfort（$r = 0.435$, $p < 0.05$）, suggesting that interface fluency and feedback quality influenced children's understanding of tea etiquette knowledge.

Table 5 Pearson Correlation Analysis

Variable	Learning interest	Task completion	Cultural cognition improvement	Interaction feedback effectiveness	Comfort
Learning interest	1				
Task completion	0.437*	1			
Cultural cognition improvement	0.623**	0.297	1		
Interaction feedback effectiveness	0.482**	0.472**	0.446*	1	
Comfort	0.28	0.328	0.435*	0.251	1

* $p<0.05$ ** $p<0.01$

*Note.*craeted by the author

The mean scores of the basic indicators further suggest that children's overall responses were positive. Cultural cognition improvement obtained the highest mean score (M = 1.167), indicating that the game supported the communication of cultural knowledge. Comfort (M = 1.067) and learning interest (M = 1.033) were also relatively high, suggesting that children accepted the interface and interaction methods. Task completion and interaction feedback effectiveness both obtained mean scores of 1.000, indicating positive evaluations while also revealing room for improvement in task guidance and feedback refinement.

Table 6 Mean Scores of Basic Prototype Validation Indicators

Indicator	Mean
Learning interest	1.033
Task completion	1.000
Cultural cognition improvement	1.167
Interaction feedback effectiveness	1.000
Comfort	1.067

*Note.*craeted by the author

Overall, task-driven learning, interaction feedback, and culturally situated scenarios improved children's learning interest and cultural cognition, thereby supporting the effectiveness of the proposed educational model. At the same time, the findings indicate that task guidance and feedback mechanisms require further optimization.

6. Conclusion and Future Work

This study addressed the problems of limited interaction and abstract knowledge in children's tea culture learning by constructing a design pathway for transforming tea etiquette knowledge into an educational game. Through literature analysis and expert interviews, the study extracted age-appropriate tea etiquette knowledge. Through questionnaires and observations, it identified key needs related to task challenges, role play, immediate feedback, and reward systems. Based on the visceral-behavioral-reflective design model, the study developed the Tea Etiquette Quest prototype. The results show that tea etiquette content can be effectively expressed through operable tasks, social scenarios, and immediate feedback, and that educational games can provide a more immersive and participatory approach to traditional culture learning.

From an interaction design perspective, the value of this study lies in decomposing traditional cultural content into designable experience elements: cultural knowledge corresponds to information architecture, etiquette procedures correspond to task pathways, behavioral norms correspond to feedback rules, and cultural identification corresponds to reflection and rewards. This decomposition helps designers avoid merely decorating games with traditional cultural symbols; instead, it encourages them to start from learning behaviors and make game mechanisms serve cultural understanding.

This study has several limitations. First, the sample size for prototype validation was limited and cannot support broad generalization. Second, the current prototype mainly validated interface and interaction processes, while full technical implementation and long-term learning outcomes still require further investigation. Third, tea etiquette varies across regions; future studies may compare children's learning content in different cultural contexts, such as Chaozhou gongfu tea and Jiangnan tea customs. Future research should conduct quasi-experimental studies in real classroom or family settings, incorporate pre- and post-tests, behavioral logs, and evaluations from parents and teachers, and further optimize accessibility prompts, voice guidance, and personalized difficulty adjustment to improve the scientific rigor and scalability of educational games for children's traditional culture learning.

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