

Using smart phone to facilitate vocabulary mobile learning and teaching in Chinese college

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Abstract:

Mobile learning is transforming the traditional classroom-based learning and teaching and bridges formal learning and informal learning. As vocabulary learning is a difficult part in English learning, how to teach and learn English vocabulary are challenge for both teacher and students in China where English as a foreign language. This paper reviewing the existing literature of MALL research on vocabulary, especially smart phone and try to explore an effective mode to apply in vocabulary learning and teaching in Chinese college.

Key words: mobile learning, MALL, vocabulary learning, smart phone. WeChat, Youdao

1. Introduction

As science and technology evolves, people's way of life also changes, and of course, the way we learn language will be affected. Mobile technology and the Internet have not only changed people's way of communication and access to information knowledge, but also continue to influenced and innovated our way of learning. In the past 20 years, with the development of mobile language learning, we have witnessed technology-based foreign language learning from CALL to MALL and gained some progress in MALL area. In particular, today's mobile devices are becoming thinner, lighter and more intelligent, especially mobile phones and tablet PCs, which help bridge formal learning with informal learning to achieve continuous learning. Under the influence of new media technology, knowledge of cognitive structure, information

obtaining and the way of acquiring knowledge have undergone a dramatic change. At present, the theoretical basis of the mobile language learning theory is constantly developing and building, and of course, with the development of theory, philosophy and science and technology, there will be some change in mobile learning features and definitions. For example, traditional laptop is considered as a handheld mobile device, but now the laptop is generally not included.

The development of smart phone provides a favorable condition for MALL, for nearly every college student owns a smart phone which is no longer a high consumption. A smart phone, 1000 yuan or so, is functional enough to become a powerful learning tool. With 4G network and wireless wifi support, students are able to access information and resources anytime and anywhere. On the other hand, mobile applications continue to update to meet various needs of users in their language learning. In addition, the life of college students is almost inseparable from the phone, which means using mobile phone mobile in English teaching will certainly become a trend.

2. Literature review

Linguist Wilkins (1972) says that " Without grammar very little can be conveyed; Without vocabulary, nothing can be conveyed." It is evident that vocabulary learning is of importance, especially for non-English majors in China where English learning as a foreign language. Vocabulary teaching is also a difficult point and challenge for Chinese tertiary education. Zhu (2003) found that numerous students consider vocabulary learning as the most difficult part when investigating English learning situations among freshmen of non-English majors. Therefore, how to improve non-English majors to study English vocabulary effectively is worth of in-depth study.

Nowadays MALL is a trend of foreign language teaching, whether in domestic or at abroad. To understand the MALL, we must first understand the characteristics of mobile learning. "MALL refers to mobile technology use for learning language. It originates from mobile learning (mLearning) and can be seen as a specialization of that field." (Viberg, O., & Grönlund, 2013) The concept of mobile learning, Sharples (2014) argues that mobile learning consists of three elements: context, social and content interaction, and use of personal electronic devices. According to Kukulska-Hulme & Shield (2008), mobile learning is done through hand-held devices that can be used at anytime, anywhere, and may be formal or informal. Crompton (2013) defines mobile learning as " learning across multiple contexts , through social and content interactions, using personal electronic devices ." Mobile learning is also defined as "the acquisition of any knowledge and skill through use of mobile technology, anywhere, anytime, which results in an alteration in behavior" (Geddes, 2004, p.214). Professor Huang (2008) hold an opinion that mobile learning refers to learners' learning in non-fixed and non-pre-set positions, or the effective use of mobile technology.

2.1 Characteristics of Mobile learning

Portability: with the continuous progress of science and technology, personal electronic equipment size is also shrinking. To meet anytime, anywhere on demand, then the previous laptop computer is no longer in the scope of mobile devices.

Situation: situation refers to cross-context, that is learning is no longer fixed in the classroom this single formal learning situation, and can also be outside the classroom (informal learning environment). learning happens between the formal learning situation and the informal learning situation, by crossing the time, space and the situation within different mobile device.

Social and content interaction: most people will visit the learning forum, follow the English learning microblog, and establish a learning groups using social interaction App to exchange and sharing idea of learners, learning resources and learning experiences.

Connectivity: the seamless connection between various devices

Personalization: students can develop and follow their own pace of learning, and adjust the learning situation, according to the study need to be carried out.

2.2 Previous research on mobile vocabulary learning

For learning English as a second language, especially as a foreign language in China, low English achievement, to a large extent, due to small vocabulary size, and a large number of Chinese students try to improve their vocabulary by reciting mechanically, so how to acquiring vocabulary effectively attracts a lot of domestic and abroad scholars' interest. Under the trend of mobile learning, the use of mobile device in vocabulary learning research continues to expand.

Research on mobile vocabulary learning is divided mainly from two aspects, one is the application of research, the other is empirical research. Application research like the development of mobile intelligence systems for college English vocabulary learning (Wang et al., 2011). Others also proposed a number of mobile vocabulary learning model, such as send vocabulary learning materials by Faction (a Chinese App).

In empirical study, Song & Fox (2008) suggests that the PDA can be applied to university foreign language teaching in a more flexible and innovative way by requiring students to use PDA's various functions to improve vocabulary acquisition. The most common research in the early years is the use of mobile phone SMS function to study vocabulary teaching. For instance, the study of Lu (2008) and Zhang et al. (2011) contrast the vocabulary learning based on SMS vs traditional paper, and both the results indicates vocabulary learning based on SMS is better than that of traditional paper materials. Recently, the use of iPad to promote language teaching is also introduced in the classroom, Wang et al (2015) applied iPad App- "Learn British English WordPower" to college freshman classroom vocabulary teaching, and proved the use of iPad vocabulary learning is more effective. There is another empirical study that using mobile

phones outside the classroom and vocabulary learning of traditional paper materials, which also proves that mobile devices can effectively improve vocabulary learning (Wang & Shih, 2015).

In Summary of the previous study, it is found that mobile vocabulary learning research mainly from two perspectives: technical perspective and teaching and learning perspective (teacher perspective and student perspective). With the progress of mobile technology, using PDA, MP3, MP4 and other electronic devices to mobile language learning is shrinking, as these devices are replaced by a more powerful smart phone, including functions like PDA, Mp3, video playback, Internet connection and other functions.

But the fruit of foreign study cannot be directly applied to China's actual situation, because mobile learning also take into account China's national conditions, such as SMS, a foreign software or APP that is not used in China. There are some domestic researches on vocabulary learning APP, but the current vocabulary learning or reciting APPs still exist deficiencies. Some are out-dated APP, like Fetion which now almost no people use. In order to make up for the shortcomings of the vocabulary learning APP in the market, like one example sentence, not easy to master the word. In addition, seldom mobile vocabulary learning is used in the routine English teaching course, thus, this study tries to explore a mobile vocabulary learning mode in the actual pedagogical situation.

3. Amode based on MALL

3.1 Two mobile App used in the design

This learning mode design uses two App, WeChat and Youdao dictionary. As WeChat is the most prevailing interaction App in China, it is a powerful and potential App that can be applied to language teaching and learning, for it contains lots of functions, including voice messages, videos, pictures and text, sharing idea and sources and so on. Its Public platform can also add some educational plug-ins to test students to get instant feedback and monitor students mobile learning activity.

Compared with traditional paper dictionary, Youdao dictionary App has its own merits. Youdao Not only convenient to carry with and be used anytime and anywhere, but also includes some authoritative dictionary, like *Longman Advanced English Chinese Dictionary*, *Collins Advanced English Chinese Dictionary* etc. It is convenient that students can look up a new word from different dictionary explanation. In addition, the user can make up their own glossary notebook with a simple tap on the star mark beside the new word. Students can also use the glossary note book to plan their new word revision. These functions are conducive to cultivate students' self-paced learning and self-learning.

3.2 Vocabulary learning mode in pedagogical design

Before the teacher begin the class, teacher use WeChat public platform to push new words

learning materials in the text book to students. According to Paivio's dual coding theory and Baddeley's working memory theory, the new word materials combine graphics, text, sound and image to form a multi-modal vocabulary learning activity that can effectively reduce the burden of student memory words. And the mobile learning time is about 10 minutes in everyday, thus the materials should not be a burden to students to study it when they need it out of class. In this way, mobile learning, to some extent, prolong the learning situation and bridge the formal and informal learning. More importantly, teacher will make good use of the class time to focus on other skill learning and training.

Then students are required to form their new word notebook in YoudaoApp. During making the glossary notebook, students have to look up the new word in Youdao dictionary and further understand the word in context, which is better than recite the new word mechanically.

To monitor students' participation, teacher will set up a WeChat dissection group where teacher can supervise students and answer students question and students can share learning experience and materials. More importantly, it can provide an actual learning situation for students to learning English in a meaningful way.

4. Conclusion and Discussion

MALL is different from the traditional teaching mode, for it breaks the limitation of classroom teaching, makes learning and teaching more flexible, and shifts the students' role from passive receiver to active learner. However, how to implement MALL in pedagogical situation is still need more exploration. On the one hand, it need the support from the school to help establish the infrastructure, like wifi connection, mobile learning sources building, teacher training etc. On the other hand, mobile learning requires high learning autonomy in students and MALL may interests students at the beginning, it may not increase students' interest in the long time. Therefore, how to make MALL more interesting is a challenge both for teachers and students.

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