

A Study on Vocabulary Teaching for English Major via Mobile Teaching APP

Li Mei

School of Foreign Languages, Nanchang Institute of Technology, Nanchang, China

Keywords: Vocabulary Teaching; English Major; Mobile Teaching APP

Abstract: This paper presents an empirical study on vocabulary strategy training for English majors in the usage of mobile teaching app. The research shows that assessing the vocabulary learning process via mobile teaching app is no longer limited by time and place, and the training of strategies in the vocabulary learning of English majors can increasingly improve students' vocabulary learning level from online to offline.

1. Introduction

1.1 Study quo of Vocabulary Teaching

Vocabulary plays an important role in college students' English learning, especially for English major students. They are supposed to have a breadth and depth of vocabulary knowledge in order to communicate with teachers and foreigners in English. Wilkins(1972:111) points out that "Very little information will be conveyed without the knowledge of grammar, while nothing can be conveyed without words". During their first and second college years, English major students are in the optimal time of learning English. As is shown in the study from MIT New (2018.5), Professor Josh Tenenbaum finds that learning a new language should start before age 10 to achieve a native like grasp the grammar, people remain highly skilled language learners until about 17 or 18, but then fall off, which Tennenbaum, says could be due to a "biological change" or "something social or cultural". As the critical period of learning a language especially words learning, English major students should grasp their best time to learn a language. Therefore, vocabulary learning has become a way for many students to measure their progress. Therefore, vocabulary teaching has been paid more and more attention in recent years. In Vocabulary requirements of College English major syllabus (2007), it provided the vocabulary requirements for students in different levels (4000-5000 English words in Level 2, 5000-6500 in Level 4, 7000-9000words in Level 6 and 10000-12000words in level 8 till graduation.) But in NIT, it is estimated that approximately 5000-6000 English words for sophomores. About 4000-5000 English words are for freshmen. The overall level just meets the requirements. What's more, students not only need to grasp the conceptual meaning of these words, but also to understand the meaning of them. In recent years, the rapid development of wireless technology and devices such as computers, PDAs (Personal Digital Assistants), IPod (portable digital audio player) and mobile phones have provided mobile learning environment and enabled learning at anytime and anywhere. These mobile devices open a new era in pedagogical field, especially in second language teaching and learning. As a novel form of learning, mobile assisted learning is characterized by its mobility, connectivity, individuality and ubiquity. Teachers can transmit instructional information to learners even if they are not in the classroom, and students can make use of their spare time to learn. Language learning via mobile devices have been studied by many researchers. Cavus and Ibrahim (2009) pointed out, "There is an increasing use of wireless technologies in education all over the world. In fact, wireless technologies such as laptop computers, mobile phones are revolutionizing education and transforming the traditional classroom based learning and teaching into anytime and anywhere education". Lomine and Buckingham (2009) summarized the advantages of teaching by mobile SMS as it is quick, discrete, to the point, and inexpensive; it can improve students' motivation and retention and involves them more actively in the learning process. Prensky (2005) hold that mobile phones are particularly useful devices that can be put into student's pockets, and can be carried no matter where they go. Chinnery (2006) suggested that use of mobile phones in

education can enrich the learning experience; provide learners with large exposure to the target content. Make it possible to learn by themselves anytime and anywhere with the help of mobile devices. Nation (2001) indicated that mobile learning enable learners to have more contact with the words, and it is considered to be more efficient than conventional way of learning massed words at one time, as learners can expose themselves to words repeatedly when using mobile devices. In previous studies, the researchers focus more on the effectiveness of mobile phones used in language teaching, but few dealt with the mobile teaching adopted by vocabulary teaching. In other word, it was also an exploring stage. In terms of the study quo of vocabulary teaching and mobile teaching, knowing how to teach students vocabulary via mobile teaching app is of theoretical and pedagogical significance.

1.2 Significance and purpose of this research

Though plenty of studies on vocabulary learning with mobile phones have done, there still exist some limitations. As for research subjects, for most previous researches, university students are often chosen as research objects. And most empirical studies are done in foreign countries; few are adopted in mainland China, so far the study on Chinese English major students is just in its infancy. As for research condition, this study focuses on the vocabulary teaching via a comprehensive course built in mobile teaching app super star, instead of special programs based on 3G services designed for a small part of learners. Unlike the studies depend on new invented technology, which is not available for all English teachers and students, this study is language oriented and can be administrated with any kind of mobile phone held by English major students and teachers. The effectiveness of vocabulary learning with mobile technologies from a Chinese EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners' perspective is explored in this study. In order to achieve the objective, a quasi-experiment study is carried out to probe whether the application of mobile app super star positively affect the vocabulary learning achievement of EFL learners, and whether learning via mobile app is a more effective approach to intentional vocabulary learning than using paper materials for Chinese English major students. Meanwhile, students' use and perspectives of learning vocabulary via app super star will be also explored through questionnaires. It is expected that the findings will be helpful for college English teachers to pay more attention to the application of vocabulary teaching through mobile teaching app is widely and popularly used by both teachers and students. It is hoped that this research can give some insights to the field of second language teaching by new technologies.

2. Research Design

Based on practical research, supplemented by theoretical research, this study will draw an objective conclusion from data analysis and questionnaire and analyze the phenomena and problems occurred in improving the students' vocabulary learning ability via mobile teaching app. The researcher chooses her own school: Nanchang institute of Technology to know the experimental class and the control class of English major in grade two of our school have one respectively, and pass the questionnaire to investigate the strategies of vocabulary teaching and the application of mobile phone app learning. Based on the results, the students will be taught how to use mobile teaching app effectively to improve their vocabulary levels.

2.1 Research subjects and questions

2.1.1 Characteristics of Contemporary College Students

Contemporary college students were born in the 1990s, and they have seen the development of information technology in their generation and contact with electronic products since childhood. They have a good mastery of information technology. Because of their using network technology skillfully, they are therefore called "the Net Generation" (Oblinger & Oblinger, 2005); and "the IM Generation", i.e. Instant-Message Generation (Lenhart, et al.2001); They are also known collectively as the Digital Native (Prensky, 2001:1-6). The daily communication of contemporary college

students is instant in which they use mobile phones, instant messenger and text messages, etc. Almost all of them have a good-signal smart phone by which they can access any devices they want to use, completely changed the traditional book information acquisition mode. They're growing up under the influence of information technology environment; they can undertake multiple tasks at the same time. For example, they can listen to music while doing their homework. They like quick feedback and enjoy interactive learning. There is no doubt that information technology has built the habit for the contemporary college student to communicate and learn. For all their advantages of using mobile phone app, they have some deficiencies like more reliance on mobile phone app and become lazy. Many students thought vocabulary learning was too boring; they hate to remember words which cost them much more time. Thus, it is a very difficult aspect of language teaching for the teachers. In regard to their communication and learning characteristics, it is imperative to change the vocabulary teaching mode. Mobile learning vocabulary mode will effectively promote students' English vocabulary Learning.

2.1.2 Mobile Teaching APP

In the traditional classroom environment, learning is static and fixed and learners have to go to school or college at specific time. Learning is also, most of the time, teacher centered. Teachers teach vocabulary often follow the steps of presenting new words, modeling the pronunciation of the words, giving their Chinese meaning and instructing students to recite them. In practice, it complies the essential steps that learners usually follow when they learn new words (Xuhong, 2004). However, due to limited class time, teachers actually seldom have time to teach vocabulary in class, as reading, listening and writing have occupied the most of class time. As a result, students spend little time in vocabulary learning, and of course perform poorly in vocabulary acquisition and retention. Therefore, it is necessary for language teachers and researchers to find an alternative way of teaching to traditional classroom learning. Studies have proved that mobile phones can be adopted in vocabulary learning. Of all the mobile phone's app, there is an easy-operated one called superstar that is right for vocabulary teaching. It has a very powerful technology-supported team behind which is different from those apps like working together or Nano box. Its advantages are in three dimensions: firstly, it breaks through the limitation of time and space and create a flat with three-terminals. Students can take their mobile teaching app to learn vocabulary. Teachers can also teach through wireless mobile terminals with their learning contents updated anytime and anywhere. The classroom is no longer the only place to teach and the classroom time is no longer the only time for teachers to answer questions. This app is getting rid of the space and time limitation of the traditional teaching mode. Secondly, it focused on the students self-taught. Students can choose the corresponding learning contents according to their knowledge level. They can also review what they have learned from mobile teaching app super star without worrying about language points. Thirdly, it helps to their interaction between the teacher and students. Students can use mobile App super star to interact with teachers, forming a client-server interactive mode. Interaction with classmates can be either a one-to-one or a one-to-multipoint model, in which students can not only share ideas and feedback, but also urge each other to learn. Students can also interact with the teaching environment and different course content. A very special feature of this app is that it can record the teacher's live video and watch them online if not limited time in class.

2.1.3 Research questions

This study makes statistical analysis through the questionnaire of vocabulary teaching and mobile teaching app, and design a training mode for vocabulary teaching, attempts to answer the following questions: (1) Whether it can maximize the efficiency in vocabulary learning aspects effect via mobile teaching app? (2) Whether the learners' vocabulary level will be improved or enlarged through the vocabulary training via mobile teaching app, and thus urge them to pay attention to and manage autonomous learning, so as to improve their overall English level?

Before the beginning of the experiment, the researcher conducted a vocabulary test on 100 students in the school of foreign languages of Nanchang institute of technology in 2017. Two classes containing basically the same number of students with high scores, medium scores and low scores

were selected. One was randomly assigned as the experimental class and the other as the control class. Through independent sample T test analysis, there was no significant difference in vocabulary level between the two classes.

3. Instruments and procedures

The main research instruments of this experiment are questionnaire, English vocabulary test and interview. The questionnaire includes a mobile teaching quos survey and a strategy questionnaire for vocabulary learning, which is adapted from the vocabulary questionnaire (VLQS) of Gu Yongqi (2003). The characteristics and advantages of the experimental class and the control class in the use of strategies were analyzed through the strategy questionnaire. The higher the average score, the higher the frequency of strategies. Interviews were conducted with the students after the training to further understand the use of strategies of vocabulary learning and the problems and needs encountered by the students in the process of vocabulary learning. In class, students are instructed to set up a specific project in mobile teaching app super star for vocabulary learning plan, aiming at the TEM-4 vocabulary database, with 10 words memorized every day and 10 minutes of learning time. According to the theory of vocabulary learning, strategy training of vocabulary is divided into three parts: pre-training, in-training and post-training.

Before the training, the teacher should give suggestion for students to pay more attention to vocabulary learning task which would be sent to mobile teaching app super star platform, and then instruct them with strategies of vocabulary learning in detail and give examples before the experiment. After receiving the feedback from students on super star platform, the corresponding and specific training strategies are proposed.

During the training, the teacher provides appropriate language tasks and arranges strategy exercises for the students according to the learning information of the students on the mobile app super star before class. Teacher should timely track the use of strategies in students' vocabulary learning, and then design activities to complete the internalization of knowledge, enable students to digest and absorb vocabulary knowledge, and provide personalized guidance.

After the training, the researcher conducts vocabulary assessment and feedback in terms of vocabulary learning objectives and problems occurred before and during training design assessment. Meanwhile, she can truly understand students' vocabulary learning effectiveness, and then find out what the problems are and constantly adjust and modify training strategies of vocabulary learning. Subsequently, she will organize class group discussion, guide students to conduct self-monitoring and self-evaluation in Mobile teaching app super star which have records and carry out the data analysis itself. At the end of the experiment, the experimental data were obtained through questionnaire survey and English vocabulary test, and SPSS software was used to analyze the English vocabulary learning of the experimental class and the control class before and after the application of strategy training in vocabulary learning.

4. Results and Discussion

1) According to the investigation of the devices the students used in English vocabulary learning, 100% of the students have access to the mobile phone vocabulary learning, 84.5% of them had tried to learn English via mobile learning, 52.5% of them are using mobile phones as a tool of vocabulary learning, 95% students use mobile phone to look for the English words, 30.5% students use cell phones to listen to the material, 32.2% of the students use mobile phone App memorizing words, 77.9% of the students think that learning English vocabulary via mobile phone is a valid method of improving their language proficiency.

2) Vocabulary test is composed of pretest and posttest. The test consists of 40 randomly selected TEM-4 words and requires students to write Chinese definitions or give synonyms and make sentences. It can also be tested in students' daily English learning. Before the training begins, students will take a vocabulary test to determine whether there are differences in vocabulary level between the experimental class and the control class.

3) Independent sample T test was conducted on the pre-test results, and the average score of EG was 39.64, the average score of CG was 37.82, and the p value was $0.345 > 0.05$, indicating that there was no significant difference in vocabulary level between the experimental class and the control class. At the end of the training, the average score of EG was 58.37. The average CG score was 45.11. The p value was $0.031 < 0.05$.

4) After the training, five students with excellent vocabulary scores and five students with low scores were selected for interviews. According to the different answers of the two groups of students, it can be seen that the students with excellent performance can better use the planning, control and evaluation strategies in the learning process, while the students with poor performance do not know when and how to use the learning strategies via mobile teaching app super star.

5. Conclusion

As the outcomes of this study demonstrate, mobile phone as a tool of English learning, can facilitate certain forms of learning. It may have some hints for English teachers and educators. EFL teachers can be encouraged to employ as a supporting learning tool to facilitate vocabulary instruction. In term of drawbacks of learning through mobile phones, many complain that staring at a small screen for a long time can create some health problems such as nearsightedness. To solve this problem, teachers should choose texts of a suitable length that can make learners focus on reading but will neither overwhelm their cognitive capacity nor make their eyes too tired. It should be taken into consideration when teachers distribute mobile learning contents to student in small segment instead of mass teaching content at one time. This research focus more on the positive influence on students' vocabulary learning, students from their own characteristics, design vocabulary learning plan and select the suitable for their own learning strategies, thus make vocabulary learning autonomy was improved. Relying on the mobile teaching app and using vocabulary learning strategies, the study extends the traditional classroom teaching. Students can make use of the advantages of mobile network terminals for better learning, and achieve anytime, anywhere learning and personalized guidance from teachers. The construction of interactive mode based on mobile learning platform and the cultivation of strategy in vocabulary learning can maximize the effect of learners in vocabulary learning. Through vocabulary strategy training, learners can improve their vocabulary, enlarge their vocabulary, and promote the importance and management of independent learning, so as to improve their overall English level.

Acknowledgment

R. B. G. thanks to the Provincial Education Reform Foundation of Jiang Xi (Project NO. JXJG-18-18-15)

References

- [1] Başoğlu, E.B., & Akdemir, Ö. A comparison of undergraduate students' English vocabulary learning: using mobile phones and flash cards [J]. The Turkish Online Journal of Educational Technology, 2010, 9(3), 1-7.
- [2] Carter, R. Vocabulary: *Applied linguistic perspectives* [M]. London: Longman. 1987.
- [3] Chinnery, G.M. Emerging technologies: going to the MALL (Mobile Assisted Language Learning) [J]. Language Learning & Technology, 2006(10): 9 –16.
- [4] Gui, S. A holistic view of English vocabulary learning in China [J]. Foreign Language World, 2006 (1): 57-65.
- [5] Houser, C., Thornton, P. & Kluge, D. (2002). Mobile learning: Cell phones and PDA's for education, Proceedings of the International Conference on Computers in Education. 2, 1149 1150.
- [6] Lu, M. Effectiveness of vocabulary learning via mobile phone [J]. Computer Assisted Learning,

2008, 24(6),515-525.

[7] O'Malley, J. & Chamot, A. Learning strategies in second language acquisition [M]. Cambridge University Press, 1990.

[8] Oxford, R. Language learning strategies: What every teacher should know [M]. New York: Newbury House, 1990.

[9] Liu Aijun, Liu Zhuqing, Chu Zhaoang. Acceptance of mobile learning and its influencing factors [J]. Open education study, 2013(4):104-111.