

# Ecological System of College English Teaching Integrated with Mobile Learning

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**Abstract:** This paper is to discuss the existing problems of current College English teaching and explore the causes from the perspective of educational ecology. Through analyzing the features of mobile learning and ESL, it testifies the feasibility and practicality of applying the mobile learning to College English teaching and raises the guidelines for constructing the ecological system of College English education. Due to the positive impacts of the key ecological factors on building up the whole system, the key factors and their practical applications have been further explored in order to offer the practical solutions to the College English teaching.

## 1. Introduction

As it increasingly grows, the mobile information technology has become an active player in all fields of ordinary life, and are changing our thinking and the way of living, working as well as learning. The China Internet Report 2018 & 2017 both shows that it boasts a dramatic growth in mobile digital tech and its industry, with its mobile broadband users and internet access totaling 1.13 billion and 24.6 billion GB respectively. China now is home to the world largest mobile internet market, with 144 million online education users, representing the rate of 19.2% until June, 2017.

Bearing such a huge group of mobile network learners and users in mind, the traditional classroom teaching is hitting dramatically, so is the college English class. A series of problems like the lack of language learning context with more learning and less practice, the static structure of language learning resources and the short of quality resources (Zhu Fengying, 2015), the large ratio of teacher to students lacking targeted teaching and making students a slower improvement (Zhou Wenjuan, 2012) are facing the college English class. As the digital generation-the children born in the 1990s enters universities, large phubbers prevail in the class. Facing such class, the college English teaching reform calls for review amid the information world.

## 2. Analysis of Difficulties Facing College English Teaching in Ecology of Education

Ecology of education, emerging in the 1970s, was put forward by American scholar Cremin(1976) in his book public education. Ecology of education focuses on the research on education and environment, and the interrelationship and influence among all elements by using the theory of ecology. Treating education as a whole ecological system, all ecological factors here would have kinds of interrelationship like symbiosis, dependence, competition and every factor shall have an impact on the whole environment and also be affected by the environment. Therefore, to analyze educational problems from the perspective of ecology not only focuses on the characteristics and rules of the subject itself, but also learns the relationship between the subject and other factors in the ecosystem.

The driving force maintaining subsystem the dynamic development is weakened and the structure and stability of subsystem are hit by external environment strongly in college English ecosystem from the perspective of the dynamic relationship between subsystem and the external ecosystem. First, China now is adjusting the whole policy of English learning, emphasizing the importance of mother tongue while weakening the foreign language studying. English learning is gradually weakened in primary and secondary school education, so there is a weaker motivation in learning English. With

the policy adjustment, the national requirements for college English courses have gradually changed from necessary to guidance, advocating school-based plan and setting. In 2007, the Department of Education issued College English Curriculum Requirements, putting forward requirements for curriculum establishment. By 2017, Higher Education Teaching Steering Committee of The Ministry of Education organized and compiled College English Guide, in which mandatory requirements have transformed into a guiding opinion. Colleges and universities have built up the relationship between CET-4 and CET-6 scores and the degree. Now, they set up their own English course system, credits and hours. Therefore, in recent years, universities have witnessed a dramatic drop in the credits of English courses and the teaching time. College English in non-foreign language schools, not regarded as core courses, is often marginalized with relatively weak teaching investment and policy support. Therefore, the internal subsystem of college English courses breaks the original balance and lack the motivation to develop in step with the external ones. Second, there is conflicts between a great shock brought by the information age on the traditional teaching mode and the closed sub-ecosystem, bringing a series of classroom crises. New generation of students have a different characteristics on the thinking mode, behavior habit and learning style. This creates a great difference comparing to other relatively stable factors, which results in many problems like the participation in college English class, the relationship between teachers and students, and students' learning effect. And some even go worse. Third, as the international trade goes deeper, there is more reasonable tendency to talents' language requirements. Different businesses have special demands, leading to students' diversified choices and individual needs for college English. So there is huge differences between these education objects with obvious changes and relatively stable teachers, teaching resources and environment. This is why the learning motivation has been further weakened.

### **3. Mobile Learning and the Education Ecosystem of College English**

Mobile learning, the product of the development of mobile technology in a certain stage, is a fashion of learning in the post-information age. Having a short research history, it originated from a mobile research in the United States in 2000, and was introduced to China by Desmond Keegan, an international distance education expert, in a speech on the 40th anniversary of Shanghai Television University. In recent years, the education community has paid increasing attention to mobile education, with the obvious rise in relevant research data especially.

Nowadays, instead of the authoritative definition, the consensus on the characteristics of mobile learning has been reached. Mobile learning is featured by the wide learning of anyone at anytime and anyplace, the personal design of targeted learners, the convenient learning resources through mobile terminals and wireless networks, and the interaction between learners and learning resources. In addition, mobile learning makes extensive use of internet resources, with the massive, infinite information storage and the non-linear, emissive and malleable learning process and mode.

Mobile learning can be divided into two generalized dimensions. In a broad sense, mobile learning refers to learning methods of using mobile terminals to obtain knowledge from mobile network, in which learning may be a kind of non-organized and spontaneous learning, such as fragmented information extraction, or a kind of organized and purposeful learning, like online learning or mobile learning associated with school education. In a narrow sense, mobile learning means learning with a certain teaching purpose and a carefully designed, organized, structured and systematic process, which teachers, learners, organizational structure and associated learning environment should be included.

Ozdamli and Cavus suggest that mobile learning is a learning system composed of five major elements including learner, teacher, content, environment and assessment. It is essential to form a system in the organized, purposeful mobile learning through the connection and cooperation among these elements to reduce the disorder, fragmentation and unsystematic nature of mobile learning so as to improving the outcomes.

Language learning calls for context and large effective input to realize the internalization and acquisition of language knowledge from the perspective of language acquisition in cognitive

linguistics. The environment of language acquisition matters its efficiency. Various researches on the second language acquisition show that immersive, interactive language situation can effectively promote the construction of language acquisition and language ability. And the characteristics of mobile learning can meet the needs of context and input in language learning. The interaction between learners and environment, learners and resources in mobile learning can satisfy the interactive needs of language learning. Hence there is a surge of studies on the use of mobile learning to improve foreign language ability since the concept of mobile learning is introduced to China. Scholars like Ye Fengyun (2012), Zhang Xingmei (2015), Zhai Fang (2015) have studied the effectiveness of mobile learning in improving English listening, speaking, reading and writing abilities from different perspectives, and the results all support the positive role of mobile teaching in promoting language competence. Therefore, it is vital to integrate the mobile learning into language learning.

The language ecosystem, featuring systematic, diversified and dynamic, should own a diversified, individualized and harmonious development. The ecological construction of foreign language teaching should be supported by and deeply integrated with information technology (Wang Shouren, 2016).

It is very important for making up the drawbacks of traditional class teaching to include mobile learning into the education ecosystem of college English. It can facilitate the dynamic development of this ecosystem by adding personalized, targeted and infinite extension features to improve the unbalance among all the elements in traditional system.

#### **4. Integrating Mobile Learning into the Education Ecosystem of College English**

##### **4.1 Guiding Principle of the Establishment of the Education Ecosystem of College English**

When it comes to the design of college English course, the focus should not be brought just on the language science, also on combing the whole, dynamic education ecosystem into all links and considering the interaction among these education elements and the effect of environment on teaching (Kang Shumin, 2012).

All the following elements should be considered to analyze and determine the specific teaching targets and modes in setting the internal teaching links of college English courses: the characters of external ecosystem, national policies, the social demand mode of language talents, college talents cultivation targets, corporate actual language requirements, the characters of teaching objects and learning needs etc.

It matters a lot to analyze the college teaching environment like resources, facilities, faculties, systematic research on the integration of mobile learning, especially on how to make use of the convenient, rich and interactive mobile learning in eco unbalanced fields to make up the drawbacks of traditional class when establishing the new class teaching mode. Mobile learning, a new ecological factor, is bound to change the original ecosystem, such as the acceptance of teachers of mobile learning, teachers' modern information methods, teachers' teaching concepts, the support of students of mobile learning, the challenges facing students' negative learning mode, the concept renewal of teachers and students, the new teacher-student relationship. The unbalance caused by these changes needs to adjustment of organization and system to help other elements transform. Adhering to integrity, continuity and openness and focusing on the future, the education system should be established by systematic analyzing all links of this ecosystem chain and formulating linkage mechanism so as to make a whole dynamic ecosystem development.

##### **4.2 Key Factors in the Establishment of the Education Ecosystem of College English**

Some key factors should be paid enough attention to research in the establishment of the education ecosystem of college English, and some sound factors would well support a better development of the whole ecosystem in turn. Firstly, supportive class environment is a must, which requires to create an open intelligent network sharing quality teaching and learning resources by the university policies,

fund and system support to changing the mobile learning technology and facilities environment in class, but also calls for improvement of teachers' inclusive cultural, emotion and interpersonal environment. Second, the individual, diversified assessment system should be introduced, which encourages teachers' various methods of assessment, changes the single evaluation and motivation mechanism featured by teaching results orientation and professional title appraisal, and improve their teaching input and innovation.

Besides, attention should be paid to a balanced and harmonious ecological niche, which refers to the position and role in a community. Ecological niche in education ecosystem of college English means the role and function of ecological factors in the college English ecosystem. How to balance the development of teacher and student niche in the creation of new ecosystem is the core problem and the biggest challenge at present.

In the establishment of the new ecology, teachers' professional development is not only a self-conscious growth inspired by teaching methods, but also depends on the organization and institutional principles of ecology. Teachers' occupation development would be effected by factors like ecological environment, the evaluation mechanism from management, reward& punishment mechanism, school cultural, academic, teaching and research atmosphere, and even universities' economic status. Therefore, changes of universities' English occupation development should be made starting from external environment. Universities should transform the current single evaluation system focusing on efficiency only, changing it from evaluation to diagnosis, identification, supervision and guidance, so that teachers can pay more attention to the teaching process. Meanwhile, they should create the more open humanistic atmosphere respecting teachers' independent innovation, encouraging them to keep trying. Diversified encouragement mechanism in personnel management system also should be set up to make them invest in teaching innovation. More opportunities should be created for foreign language teachers to study and communicate, improving their teaching exploration. The information technology and teaching research supportive departments shall be established, so that teachers' occupation development can get professional and convenient guidance to create proper environment for sustainable, stable teachers' ecological niche.

## 5. Summary

Foreign language teaching is a natural, open ecological system with various elements and environment in a certain space. All teaching elements here are mutual dependent and interact with each other, forming a sound, proper state (Chen Jianlin, 2010). Breakthroughs in college English teaching only happen when it conforms to the characteristics of The Times and the rules of language learning, and reforms according to local conditions. The concept of digital native, by Mark Prensky, shows that the generation growing up in the digital environment has a totally different way of learning, and even their brain structure and thinking mode changes greatly. They can capture and accept information quickly, be fond of chart visualization, and be skilled in dealing with multi-mission and accessing knowledge chain randomly (Yang Junfeng, Yu Huiju, 2015). Therefore, as the society go digital further, mobile learning is bound to be a very essential, normal way of learning, a problem unavoidable by school education. Obviously, how to improve universities' English ecological environment in line with learners characteristics has already become a tough problem, which should be given wider, deeper researches.

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