The Application of MALL to College English Vocabulary Learning*

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How to best exploit the potential of information technological resources to improve teaching efficiency is a key area for further College English pedagogical reform. Vocabulary learning mode based on MALL (Mobile Assisted Language Learning) will be the main trend of future development, and is conducive to breaking through the limitations of time and space. It helps to create a learning situation suitable for college students, making them the main body of learning and achieving growth and happiness in the interaction between teachers and students.

Keywords: MALL, vocabulary, apps

Introduction

Jeremy Harmer (1991) believes that “if structure is the skeleton of language, vocabulary is the most important organ and flesh and blood”. Wilkins (1972, p. 111) pointed out that “little information can be conveyed without grammar, and nothing can be conveyed without vocabulary. Vocabulary plays an important role in English learning”. According to the 2007 college English curriculum requirements, college English has a “higher” vocabulary of 7,675 words. Students are required to have a vocabulary of 3,300 by the time they graduate from high school. So the 4,375 words that students need to master in college are not only conceptual but also correlative. However, vocabulary seems to be one of the most perplexing problems for most English learners, who often spend a lot of time on vocabulary transcription, recitation and sentence construction, with little effect. Therefore, if only by rote, vocabulary will be one of the major obstacles for students to learn English. “College English course teaching requirements” (2007 edition) puts forward: “colleges and universities should make full use of modern information technology and adopt English teaching mode based on computer and classroom… To a certain extent, English teaching and learning can be independent of time and place, and develop toward personalized and independent learning. The new college English teaching guide (submitted for review) attaches great importance to the deep integration of information technology and foreign language education” (Wang Shouren, 2016). MALL breaks through the time and space limitations of traditional teaching mode, enabling students to change passive learning into active learning. Therefore, vocabulary learning mode based on MALL will be the main trend of future development. This paper discusses the vocabulary teaching mode from the perspective of MALL, aiming to help students improve their interest in English vocabulary learning and stimulate

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their subject consciousness in English learning, so as to expand their vocabulary and improve the efficiency of their independent learning.

**Overview of MALL**

In recent years, with the rapid development and popularization of communication technology, MALL is a new learning mode. MALL (Mobile Assisted Language Learning) is often defined as learning with the help of mobile electronic devices (Quinn, 2000). Abroad for MALL research started relatively early, the earliest can track back to 2000, the university of California, Berkeley, where human-computer interaction research center set up a “Mobile Education” project team, and at the same time, in the United States of Stanford university, the Stanford study inspection room “also try to apply the MALL to language course at the university and has obtained certain achievements. Foreign MALL applications have been involved in all aspects of society, such as primary and secondary school education, higher education, vocational education, distance education, etc., which can be said to be in full swing oriented to the various crowd in the society with the feature of relative maturity and strong practicability. Compared with foreign countries, the application and research of MALL in China started relatively late, but it develops rapidly with high recognition and attention, and is especially favored by English educators and researchers. As educator Desmond Keegon said, “MALL represents future learning”.

Compared with the CALL (computer assisted language learning), MALL has some unique features: (1) Ubiquity. Learners can learn “anytime”, “anywhere” and “on demand” through mobile communication devices. Teaching and learning can be separated in time and space, effectively maintaining the continuity of learning; (2) Timeliness and interactivity. Mobile information support real-time interaction, high transmission efficiency, more can stimulate access to the spontaneity of learning content; (3) Personalization. Teachers can design diversified presentation methods according to learners’ characteristics and needs, and better integrate the relationship between teachers’ “leading” and students (Tian Jianqiu, 2009); (4) Situational correlation. It is the development of various APP software at present, such as scallop words, extension words, 100 words cut, etc., illustrated with pictures and texts, and equipped with certain animation and audio that facilitate students to experience the corresponding language situation in English vocabulary learning. Therefore, MALL also has situational relevance. Lin Xinshi (2008) pointed out that “situational principle, diversification principle, recurrence principle, independent learning principle and feedback principle” should be adhered to in English vocabulary teaching. It can be seen that MALL is consistent with college students’ flexible time and flexible learning needs, which represents the trend and direction of education innovation in the era of big data. MALL can not only meet the learning and communication needs of contemporary college students, but also fit the principles that vocabulary teaching should adhere to. Therefore, English vocabulary teaching based on MALL should be feasible and effective, so it is worth exploring by teachers in teaching practice.

**College English Vocabulary Learning Mode**

Learning English vocabulary is a gradual process, which cannot be accomplished overnight or once and for all. Memorizing the spelling and Chinese meaning of a word does not mean mastering the word completely. So what does it mean to master a word? Jeremy Harmer (1991) listed the following figure.
As is shown in the picture, a complete grasp of a word should include its meaning, usage, lexical information and morphology. Of course, in English learning, the learning of English listening, speaking, reading, writing, translating, pronunciation and vocabulary are not completely independent. They are interdependent and complementary, and MALL-based vocabulary learning is no exception.

1. The Construction of MALL Community

With the development of the information age, SMS, email, WeChat, Microblog, QQ, etc. are no longer strange to us, but have become an important part of our daily communication and learning. Therefore, we can easily use these ways to learn English vocabulary. For example, in teaching, we can often use QQ group and WeChat platform to communicate with students, and urge students to learn English, usually according to the “division of labor before class, class inspection and review after class” three steps.

First is the learning of text words. At the beginning of the semester, the students were divided into 5 study groups, each group is responsible for one unit, and were required to record the words in Passage A, and then they should send audio to the QQ group. As to the usage of key words in the text and the expansion of vocabulary knowledge, teachers will send them to students to learn. If other students have any questions, they will communicate in the QQ group or WeChat group, or meet and communicate during the class. In class, teacher will check students’ learning of words, including pronunciation, use of key words, expansion of vocabulary knowledge and fixed collocation, or will have a dictation and test of key words in class. It can supervise the students to use their spare time to learn how to pronounce the word, word meaning and usage, at the same time it can save the class time and increase the students’ autonomous learning. By this way, students’ learning interests are motivated. Some students are particularly interested in a recording of words and in order to do their best, they
will seriously again and again record the pronunciation of the word. Obviously, they also will not be restricted by time and space and can learn the new words of the entire unit before the teacher teach them.

Second is TED micro video learning. Combined with the characteristics of college English comprehensive course, each unit has a learning theme. The teacher selects and downloads the micro video which is similar to or related to the text topic through the Internet. The selected video generally does not exceed 15 minutes, and sends the micro video to the QQ group in advance. The teacher asks the students to remember the main ideas and key words in the micro video after independent learning. These TED micro video are mainly from Tencent open class and Netease open class. Both the explanation and production are of high quality, and they are also equipped with Chinese and English subtitles, which is not too difficult for non-English major students to learn. In class, the teacher gives the topic related to the text, asks the students to make a brief answer combining the micro video and their own opinions, occasionally replays the micro video in class, and invites the students to restate the main ideas and content with the key words in the video. Students especially like short TED micro video learning with high enthusiasm. In order to have a deeper understanding of students’ learning of words, the teacher will select some words from micro video to have a dictation besides the words from the text. At the beginning of the trial stage, the teacher is mainly responsible for looking up and downloading the relevant micro video. After a period of time, the students start to actively look up micro video, and share and learn the better micro video they find with the teacher. Take College English 1 andCollege English 2 for example, students find and share the micro video “How to Practice Effectively”, “5 Tips to Improve Your Critical Thinking”, “Boost Your Confidence”, “Saving for Tomorrow”, etc. which are related to the theme of the text. TED micro-video learning enriches the English vocabulary learning methods of college students, provides students with language learning situation, shows the use of key vocabulary, and more importantly, mobilizes students’ subject consciousness in English learning.

Third is the interactive learning of vocabulary with high recurrence rate in Chinese and English versions of current political information. There is no end to learning and no end to teaching. You can learn English from books, you can learn it from audio, you can learn it from video, you can learn it in the classroom, you can learn it in the library, in short, no matter through text, pictures, sounds or animations, you can learn English anytime and anywhere. In addition to the study of textbook content, teacher will to send students political information in both Chinese and English every two weeks, mainly from the prime minister’s report on the work of the government in 2017 and 2018, and materials on “one Belt and one Road” and then ask the students to consult the new words of the materials.In addition, students are required to check and learn the top 10 words with the highest repetition rate through retrieval. The teacher will check students through the dictation of the words with the words in the text. Through the study of current political information, it is helpful for students to understand the country’s major policies, and then be clear-sighted and broaden their basic English knowledge.

2. MALL Based on APP Software

College English is an integral part of higher education. For many students, college English is also the final stage of English classroom learning. How can students put what they have learned into practice after years of learning English instead of forgetting what they have learned at the end of the course? MALL guided by the concept of lifelong learning is the best choice.
2.1 Use Various Apps

Students are encouraged to actively explore and discover various apps to help them learn English. For example, students can learn the extensive vocabulary reference through “Youdao dictionary”, “PowerWord” and so on. They can also learn systematically through such apps as “Baici Zhan”, “Tuoci”, “Scallop words” and so on. Students can learn multi-modal vocabulary through pictures, texts, dynamic images, video and audio in the system. This kind of APP provides students with the appropriate situation for their vocabulary learning. At the same time, the word repetition rate is very high, which is helpful for students to understand and remember the words. At present, there are various kinds of apps, which encourage students to choose their own learning. The advantages are obvious:

(1) Automatic sorting of error-prone words can improve the efficiency of memorizing. When students memorize words in a unit, they may not remember them due to long words, irregular letter arrangement and other reasons. In the traditional teaching, the teacher can only test by the method of dictation, in order to strengthen the students by repetition. The tracking times of each student are usually 1-2 times. In the application program, the system will automatically record the students’ dictation and feedback, and the wrong words will be presented repeatedly, requiring students to repeat the memory until they are proficient. This personalized way of memorizing significantly reduces the burden on students, so that they do not have to repeat the words they have mastered, greatly saving students’ time.

(2) Automatically record the memory curve to reduce the forgetting speed. The Ebbinghaus forgetting curve tells us that forgetting in learning is regular, that is, “first fast, then slow”. Therefore, mastering effective recitation and memorizing methods will be more helpful for students to memorize efficiently. The “Momo” app can automatically generate a memory curve of a student and give an instant reminder. In this way, as long as students open the mobile terminal, they can see the extent of their vocabulary forgetting, so as to be able to consolidate in time.

(3) Automatic reminder of the number of words and customized learning plan. Students can customize the learning capacity in the application, such as reciting 10 or 20 words a day. Students recite on time every day; the application will be accurate clocking records. Teachers can also check at any time whether students complete the amount of memory every day. It will not allow students to make up if they cannot complete the punch card every day, which prevents students from assaulting memorizing words in order to deal with the teachers’ examination.

2.2 Use Scallop News

At the beginning of the semester, every student is required to download “scallop news” on his/her mobile phone, learn news at least once a week, read two pieces of news at a time, and make a learning card record for mid-term and final examination. Students are required to clock in at least 18 times in a semester, and give appropriate points in the usual grades. In addition, in the first 10 minutes of every English class, the teacher will invite two students to have a communication and sharing of the main news information. Students are well prepared before class. And every timethey enter the classroom, their enthusiasm is very high, and early before the class they would write the title and key words of the news they are going to communicate and share on the blackboard. In the process of news explanation, students are required to mainly introduce important information and not read the news word by word. Different students will have different feelings on the same news and express
their own opinions in class. Through the study of scallop news, students can not only put what they have learned into practice and obtain information in English, but also strengthen the independent learning of English, enrich the content of English learning, master news vocabulary, and more importantly, lay a solid foundation for their lifelong English learning after two years English learning in university.

2.3 Use Campus Network Resources

At present, the wireless network has achieved full coverage in our school campus, students can make full use of the campus network resources anytime and anywhere to download relevant resources. For example, the teacher can make up the part of vocabulary explanation in class into a micro lesson and transmit it to the Internet, which can also include courseware, teaching plan, learning plan and so on. After class, students can click on the link of related resources of a unit to review at any time according to their own learning needs. At the same time, the school also developed a campus interactive space. Students can send the vocabulary problems encountered in learning to teachers via short messages at anytime and anywhere. Teachers can provide different forms of guidance to different groups according to the common or individual problems of students. In the interactive space, students can send messages to each other and carry out cooperative learning. Teachers can also initiate a discussion and an activity in the interactive space, so that students can constantly collide their wisdom in the collective discussion, and truly make English vocabulary learning a happy thing that everyone is willing to participate in.

Conclusion

From the above analysis, it can be seen that learning vocabulary through mobile terminals is conducive to breaking through the limitations of time and space, creating a learning situation suitable for college students, making them the main body of learning and achieving growth and happiness in the interaction between teachers and students.

At present, there are many applications suitable for vocabulary memorization, but any one of them has its advantages and disadvantages. In these applications, teachers first try to figure out how to use them in a way that actually fits the learning characteristics of college students. Only through the correct use of mobile terminals will learning efficiency be greatly improved. However, there are also some students who use learning as an excuse to watch video on the Internet or play games, which violates the original intention of learning. As a teacher, we should not give up eating for fear of choking, nor ignore what we are doing. Instead, we should strengthen management and supervision, improve students’ learning consciousness, pay attention to their feedback and stimulate their learning motivation.

References


