

Study of College Students' English Learning in Mobile Learning Community

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Abstract. Mobile learning community (MLC), a mode that provides a platform for both educators and students to share learning resources and communicate with each other, satisfies the needs of educators and learners. This study aims at exploring perceptions of college students' English learning in MLC and analyzing the strengths and weaknesses of MLC during the teaching and learning process, then taking measures to promote the development of MLC.

Introduction

21 century is a century with booming information technology, as wireless network is available in most urban areas, especially in universities. Wireless network is essential for teachers' teaching and students' learning, so based on wireless network mobile learning community, a new learning mode is being formed. Invariably, many new learning modes are good platforms for college students' English learning, and this is no exception. As a new mode of teaching and learning, MLC draws many educators' and learners' attentions. In the field of college English education, researchers abroad and domestic have done a great quantity of researches on learning community and mobile learning, but researches on MLC is relatively inadequate.

This paper aims at researching current situation about college students' English learning in MLC, including students' learning perceptions, devices and types of MLC. During this process, we designed questionnaires and interviews to collect statistics and data, both quantitative and qualitative ones, based on which analysis and conclusion have been made.

The development and concepts of Learning Community (LC), M-learning (ML) and M-learning Community (MLC).

Dewey was the first one to apply "community" to learning and teaching field. He postulated that "the society is a community of thought and emotion which are based on the interpersonal communication" [1]. This concept of community was used in education to stress the social interaction among learners.

Learning community is formed based on learners' purpose of learning and educators' purpose of teaching, which was first definitely proposed by Boyer .E. After studying and researching on American basic schools, he published a report titled *The basic school: a community of learning*. It seemed that schools are the typical communities for students. Later, more and more experts and educators were absorbed in LC, putting forward a large number of theories. Myers and Simpson

thought “every participant is responsible for the study and mutual benefit in LC”; Shirley M. Hond thought “learning community is a cooperative community, in which the participants share resources”.

Mobile learning is a new type of learning on the basis of the development and popularization of mobile technology, for example, supported by mobile devices (such as phones and tablets) learners can study anywhere and anytime. According to the research of Yiannis Laouris, opinions vary greatly from individual to individual when it comes to the use of term ML. Quinn defined it as simply study with the help of mobile devices [2]. In contrast, several authors took mobile devices as a ubiquitous medium that may assist learners in combining work, study and leisure time in meaningful ways. Traxler defined it as “any educational provision where the sole or dominant technologies are handheld or palmtop devices” [3]. Sharples took a different approach, describing learning “as a process of coming to know, by which learners in cooperation with their peers and teachers construct transiently stable interpretations of their world” [4]. Mobile technologies dramatically increase learners’ possibilities of communication and conversation. ML is the production by combining education with modern information technology [5].

Mobile learning community is the development and extension of LC and MC, based on the maturity of wireless network. According to Richard Stone, who thought it is significant to practice ML applied with LC, building a favorable MLC for mobile learners will provide an excellent chance for students to communicate with each other. College students with the same goals (academic discussion, exams, etc.) from different regions join certain MLC to share their resources and communicate with community members about their experience of learning [6].

We ran CNKI in June 2016 using “mobile+ learning” as the key words and received 7,342 items. When ran it on cqvip.com and received 4,100 items. However, when using “mobile learning + community”, we received 64 items on CNKI and 51 on cqvip.com. While added key words like “English” and “college students” there is no item on both. Form the statistics, a simple conclusion can be drawn that the researches on MLC are very limited, especially the research on College Students’ English Learning in MLC.

It is widely acknowledged that college students have more accesses to MLC. They have more free time and are more interested in mobile applications, moreover they have intensive needs of English learning in MLC. Therefore, this study mainly focus on Chinese college students’ English learning in MLC to solve the problem appeared in MLC.

Results and Analysis

The statistics of this thesis are based on two types of questionnaires designed to get a clear understanding of the current situation of college students’ English learning in MLC. Questionnaire 1 is designed for students, the questions are about their major (English major or non-English major), knowledge of MLC, devices, means, time duration, efficiency and attitudes. We handed out 220 questionnaires and took back 218 valid ones, the effective rate goes up to 99%. Questionnaire 2 is designed for teachers, concerned with their knowledge of MLC, attitudes, efficiency of students’ learning, influences on traditional education. We handed out 20 questionnaires and took back 20 valid ones with effective rate 100%. Based on these statistics, we use Excel and SPSS to analyze.

Analysis of MLC and their characteristics. Questionnaire 1 has been designed to reveal the current situation of MLC. As for the applications students use in English MLC, overwhelming majority of students (92.2%) use phone to study English in MLC and tablets (61.47%) are also very commonly used among college students. The data indicates that the devices and access to MLC is existent, students indeed learn English through this mode. But researches on this field relevant to

MLC are scarce, causing students' little knowledge of it. So it is necessary to have an overall research on its developments, functions and effects.

According to Fig. 1, it is clear that there are four main types of college students' English study in MLC. QQ course group is the widest used application which accounts for 72.48%, while MOOC accounts for 38.53%, Wechat group 28.44% and other forums 15.14%.

Fig. 1: The platforms students used for English MLC

options	subtotal	ratio
QQ course groups	158	 72.48%
Wechat course groups	62	 28.44%
MOOCS	84	 38.53%
Other study forums	33	 15.14%
Total of students	218	

QQ Course Group. For Chinese students, QQ is the most universal social networking software, almost every student has at least one QQ account. QQ course group is guided by teachers. Besides sharing learning resources and asking teachers for timely help, group members can share their own ideas together via communication, discussion and debate through text messaging, hold-to-talk voice messaging, broadcast (one-to-many) messaging and videos. Chen, a researcher, chose a QQ chat group with 10 members to do research, finding that due to the nature of QQ group and definition of the identity of the participants within a multi-exchange group, discussions are usually involved in homework and common interest[7]. The characteristics of QQ course group can be summarized as interaction, confidentiality, diversity of communication and learning.

Wechat Course Group. WeChat is a mobile text and voice messaging communication service developed by Tencent, one of the largest standalone messaging apps by active users and is available on almost all kinds of phones. According to the recent statistics, at the end of May 2016, more than one billion created accounts, 700 million active users got involved with WeChat.

WeChat course group extremely resembles QQ course group. It is also guided by teachers and its characteristics almost the same as QQ course group. Based on the popularity of Wechat some university applied it into teaching, taking the MTA(micro teaching assistant) of Central China Normal University for example.

MOOCs. MOOC, "massive open online course", as a new type of MLC, aims at unlimited participation and open access via the web. Owing to abundant learning resource and interactions with other learners, professors and teaching assistants in forums, many learners tend to apply this method in their learning. However, according to Wikipedia, the completion rates are typically lower than 10%, taking the course bioelectricity 2012 at Duke University for example, 12,725 students enrolled, but only 7,761 watched a video, 3,658 attempted a quiz, 345 attempted the final exam and 313 passed, earning a certificate. With advantages of massive materials and open accesses, the study of best use of MOOC will be extremely beneficial for global learners.

To sum up, the observations above shows that MLC can be divided into two parts: MLC organized and guided by teacher and MLC organized by learners themselves with no guiders. Generally speaking, the academic level of the former is higher as it is more convenient for learners to ask for help and more disciplined. The latter, such as the forum for entrance exams for postgraduate schools without authoritative guiders, offers more freedom, but requires more

self-control.

Further analysis of college students' learning in MLC. For the interview, we chose 10 students randomly from the students who answered the questionnaires. Following are the questions for the interview.

Question 1: During your English study in MLC, what's the strengths?

Question 2: what's about the weaknesses about this method?

Question 3: what are your suggestions to perfect this method?

The strengths of MLC. Combing analysis of questionnaire 1 with interview, researchers find there are some remarkable strengths of MLC. We divide them into two parts and analyze them for the aspects of technology development and emotion.

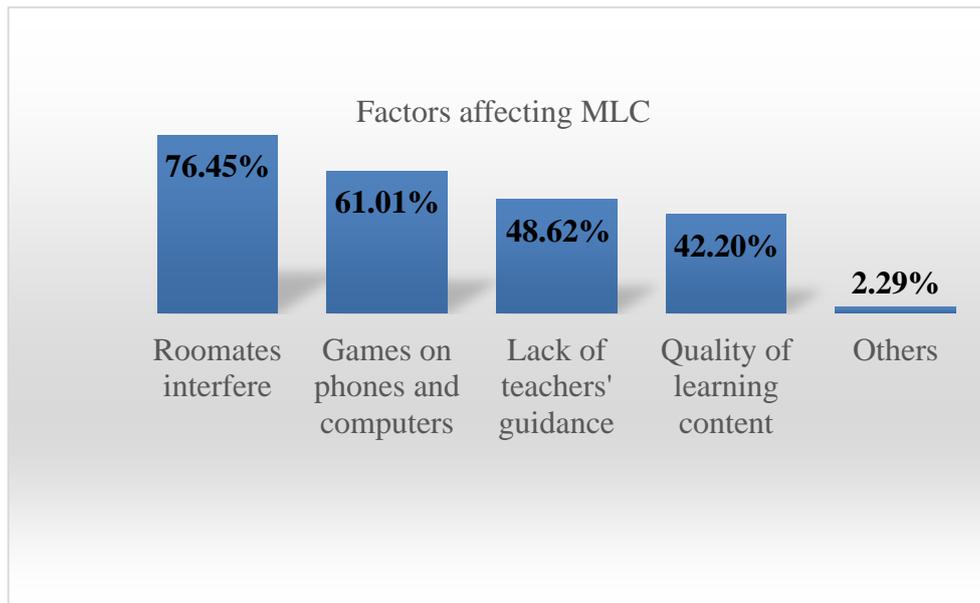
Technology development can be the key factor. Firstly, with the development of technology, wireless network (such as Wifi, EDU) becomes widely used, especially at college campus, wireless network covers almost the entire campus, making it possible for students to learn English in MLC anytime and anywhere. Secondly, the devices for students' English learning are more multifunctional (text, voice, video, e-mail, picture are all available with phones) which contributes to the diversity of communication forms of MLC. Thirdly, owing to the improvement of social software and learning software (QQ, WeChat and website forums), a large amount of study information, materials and tasks can be uploaded. Both guiders and learners share abundant learning resources. And the process of the assistance can be recorded, if you need help later, you can retrace the learning process you need.

Moreover, during interview researchers find that some students are afraid of asking questions in traditional classes. When asking questions in MLC, learners needn't have a face-to-face talk with guiders, which might be a suitable way for those learners who are shy, MLC provides them with an anonymous way to ask questions. In MLC both learner-guider communications and learner-learner communications are abundant. Through communications, their feeling for this community and for the members in this community will be changed over time. Gradually they will have a sense of community. Consequently, the passions for both teaching and learning will raise.

The weaknesses of MLC. The investigation concludes that daily learning time is limited for English study in MLC. The vast majority of students' learning time is shorter than one hour (70%). Fig. 2 shows that because of the interfere of roommates, classmates, phones and computers and lack of teachers' guidance, the efficiency of English learning in MLC is not desirable.

The weaknesses consist of two aspects. One is the limitation of technology. Many areas in our country have no network or wireless network, particularly some rural areas. Students in these area, can't have access to MLC. The other aspect is the deficiency of students' self-control and teachers' guidance (48.62%), causing learning efficiency is rather low. MLC sometimes is relatively free for learners. When learners autonomous perception are not strong enough, too much freedom will spoil the efficiency of MLC.

Fig. 2: Factors affecting MLC



Measures for further development of MLC

During the whole research, strengths and weaknesses are within our horizon. On the one hand, we should take full advantage of the strengths to promote the development of MLC. On the other hand, we are obliged to face the weaknesses and take actions to dispose them. Firstly, students' awareness of MLC must be raised, which is the solid foundation to form a more powerful MLC. Educators, as guiders of learning, play an important role in raising students' awareness. So they are supposed to have a comprehensive knowledge of MLC and help students realize its importance and strengths. Secondly, students should enhance self-control. As the learning process is lack of educators' regulation, students' self-control is of great significance. As for regulation, a sound electronic system should be developed to help monitor students' learning. For example, the time they used to finish exercises must be limited; the answers to objective questions aren't allowed to be totally the same as others. Thirdly, wireless network should be more accessible to students. According to this research, many students mentioned that the wireless networks are very limited in college campus and they even have no access to campus network if they don't pay for it. Other networks, such as EDU, CMCC, CMCC-EDU need to be paid as well. Under this circumstance, students can not apply to MLC anytime and anywhere, which is consort with the principle of mobile learning. To solve this problem, both government and schools should expand free wireless networks to provide students more favorable learning condition. For schools, they should import advanced technology to promote the development of MLC and encourage teachers to teach through this mode. What matters most is that schools should provide free network for students, by which mobile learning will be indeed achieved. For government, they should have foresight to MLC and make full use of its educational function to advocate MLC, providing more technology and fund for schools to build MLC.

All in all, in this booming information technology era, students, educators, schools and governments should adapt themselves to this new learning mode to strengthen learners' abilities in autonomous learning, cooperative learning.

Conclusion

MLC, with the support of multifunctional devices and wireless network gradually shows its potential in college students' English learning. Owing to its efficiency and convenience, it becomes the most popular study means outside class. This research takes SPSS and Wenjuanxing(a platform to send questionnaire and get analysis) to analyze statistics we received. We mainly investigate three learning modes relevant to MLC, types of MLC and students' attitudes towards MLC. Based on the investigations above, measures have been explored to dispose them.

At large, most students possess perceptions of autonomous learning, cooperative learning and lifelong learning. They also apply these learning perceptions into practice in English learning. They usually use QQ course group, Wechat course group, MOOCs and other forums to facilitate English learning in MLC. These platforms provide them a large amount of learning materials and ways to communicate directly with educators and other learners. However, though most student join MLC to learn English, they have no awareness of it and they can't give a definition of it. The research of college students' English learning situation in MLC which has been introduced here reveals the weaknesses and advantages of MLC, which is important for improving and learning process.

On the whole, this study finds out current situation about college students' English learning in MLC from questionnaires and interviews, analyzes the advantages and weaknesses and then proposes suggestions for development of MLC. There are three main limitations of this research. Firstly, before the research, we ignored the differences between English major and non-English major, which might result in the inaccuracies of this study. Secondly, the research objects we selected are merely from our university, the results may not be so representative. In addition, the research period is not long enough, we can not get much feedback of students' English learning in MLC. In the future research, we will continue to explore students learning perceptions in MLC, and try to search new MLC modes to promote the development of MLC and eventually promote college students' English learning.

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