The Impact of Clickers Use on Vocabulary Knowledge and Satisfaction in an EFL Class in China

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ABSTRACT

Clickers are catching growing attention in education. This study, using data collected from a questionnaire, forty content words, and a vocabulary knowledge scale, aims to identify if clickers can enhance EFL (English as a foreign language) vocabulary knowledge and raise students’ satisfaction level compared with the traditional multimedia-based instruction. Gender differences were also explored. Data from 115 EFL learners showed that: (1) Clickers-based instruction significantly increased participants’ satisfaction level compared with traditional multimedia-based instruction in an EFL class; (2) Clickers-based instruction significantly enhanced participants’ vocabulary knowledge compared with traditional multimedia-based instruction in an EFL class; (3) Males were significantly more satisfied with clickers-based instruction than females in an EFL class and there were no significant gender differences in satisfaction levels under multimedia-based instruction; (4) Males obtained significantly more vocabulary knowledge than females under clickers-based instruction, while females obtained significantly more vocabulary knowledge than males under multimedia-based instruction.

Keywords: Clickers, EFL, Multimedia, Satisfaction, Vocabulary Knowledge

1. INTRODUCTION

English vocabulary learning is considered an essential component in foreign language acquisition in China. Students are required to command different ranges of vocabulary on different levels in universities. Despite the fact that vocabulary learning has attracted great attention from both students and teachers, students still typically learn vocabulary by rote memorization of lexicon lists in their textbooks, coupled with those books specialized in word list for a specific examination (Gan et al., 2004). Students are subject to rote memorization and tend to deem word learning a boring chore. Although they spent a large amount of energy...
and time on vocabulary, only a small portion can remain in their memory for long. This common phenomenon calls for innovation in vocabulary instruction.

Learning English vocabulary is an enormous challenge for Chinese native speakers because Chinese and English are vastly different languages from different typologies (Wu, Lowyck, Sercu, & Elen, 2013). Chinese (Mandarin) belongs to a tone language, whose changes in tones of the same sound convey different semantic meanings. English, however, is classified into an intonation language which relies more on morphology and word sequence. Chinese writing is mainly logographic with each symbol representing a word, while English writing is majorly alphabetic with each symbol representing phonemes (Smith et al., 2013). Beyond these differences, English acquisition is a difficult process because the vocabulary range of English is larger than any other language (Sewell, 2008). Furthermore, English language, reflecting various histories, borrows words from a vast number of other languages (Sewell, 2008).

Besides the differences between English and Chinese, other factors also contribute to the difficulty in learning English vocabulary. Many students underwent boring experience with English words, such as rote memorization of lists of words independent of contexts (Gan et al., 2004, p. 236). Worse, some teachers ask students to memorize words based on specific letters within words rather than on pronunciation. The letter arrangements may have impressed the students temporarily, but later, they tend to forget what they have acquired. Hardly believed but really true, some beginners, suggested by the teacher, make every effort to pronounce words by transcribing English words with Chinese characters. Chinese characters, though some of whose sounds may be similar to English, will never be able to function as an exactly correct phonetic replacement of English. As a result, students often pronounce English words sourcing from Chinese, which sounds awkward and incorrect. In this way, students feel hard to follow the standard English speaking and thus the memory of words will hardly last long.

Until now, numerous studies have discussed the effectiveness of use of clickers in learning and teaching. However, it is still a mystery whether the use of clickers has any added value for EFL students. The assumption that use of clickers might be effective in the EFL environment would be tested in this study.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous studies on use of multimedia and clickers, satisfaction of clickers users, gender differences in use of educational technologies will be reviewed in this section.

2.1. The Use of Multimedia and Clickers

Multimedia glosses to enhance EFL vocabulary acquisition are composed of various modalities, e.g. textual, visual, and auditory and modes, e.g. video, picture, and text (Mohsen & Balakumar, 2011). The different displays of words through multimedia, such as pictures, videos and sound, etc., led to more effective vocabulary learning than those with texts alone (Gettys, Imhof, & Kautz, 2001). Abraham’s (2008) meta-analysis of computer-aided vocabulary learning revealed that glosses played a largely positive role in EFL vocabulary learning. Lyman-Hager, Davis, Burnett, and Chennault (1993) argued that multimedia could improve EFL vocabulary learning. Generally, multimedia glosses have been found effective in improving EFL vocabulary learning.

Many studies have explored the use of clickers in class. The use of clickers in large-lecture introductory biology courses has achieved success in learning outcomes (King, 2011). Clickers have witnessed growing popularity in recent years, largely due to their role in encouraging all students to participate in lectures (Caldwell, 2007; Collins, 2007; Cain and Robinson, 2008; Collins, 2008). Several studies demonstrated that the use of clickers during lectures improved student performance on exams in undergraduate science classes (e.g.,
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