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*Research Article*

# Reform of College Students' Foreign Language Vocabulary Teaching and Effectiveness Analysis of Students' Vocabulary Competence Based on Corpus Teaching Method

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## Abstract

Traditional foreign language vocabulary education pays too much attention to vocabulary and ignores the depth of vocabulary application, resulting in the low vocabulary application ability of students. In order to promote the reform of foreign language vocabulary teaching and mobilize the enthusiasm of students' vocabulary learning, this paper carries out the effectiveness analysis of corpus teaching for the teaching and learning of foreign language vocabulary, aiming at providing scientific guidance for the teaching of foreign language vocabulary. On the basis of the analysis of the current situation of corpus and vocabulary teaching, the paper applies the corpus teaching in non-English majors in a university in Fujian Province to collect the vocabulary test scores of the experimental class and the blank class by pre-testing and post-testing. The test results show that there are significant differences in the English vocabulary score of the experimental class before and after the corpus teaching and the score is higher than that of blank class. The corpus teaching mode improves the students' lexical collocation, context application and autonomous learning ability. At the same time, the corpus teaching mode also promotes the reform of foreign language vocabulary education with the help of science and technology.

## Keywords

Corpus Teaching • Foreign Language Vocabulary • Teaching Reform • Learning Ability

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As one of the three major elements of language, vocabulary plays a key role in foreign language learning. Vocabulary learning can be divided into the learning of vocabulary and vocabulary extended application from breadth and depth. Due to the influence of traditional vocabulary teaching concept and vocabulary acquisition concept in domestic vocabulary teaching, vocabulary teaching pays more attention to the improvement of vocabulary, while ignoring the improvement of vocabulary situation application ability (René Zeelenberg *et al.*, 2015). The boring vocabulary teaching mode makes college students have low interest in vocabulary learning at this stage and thus how to improve the quality of vocabulary teaching and mobilize the vocabulary learning enthusiasm of college students is of great research significance (Yum *et al.*, 2014).

The development of modern computer information technology has made it possible for computational-aided technology to serve vocabulary learning. The application of corpus teaching in vocabulary learning has already achieved certain results (Macedonia *et al.*, 2009). Many scholars have explored the theoretical guidance and method of corpus linguistics for foreign language teaching. Some domestic scholars have conducted vocabulary teaching practice using corpus at home and abroad or self-built learner corpus. However, there are relatively few researches on corpus with vocabulary teaching reform and vocabulary learning depth and the research on foreign language vocabulary depth and vocabulary learning enthusiasm still needs to be supplemented (Jeong *et al.*, 2010).

This paper applies corpus and corpus learning theory to the English vocabulary teaching practice in colleges and universities in order to analyze the effectiveness of corpus teaching method for the in-depth learning of vocabulary for college students through practice and effectiveness of corpus teaching reform for the improvement of students' English vocabulary application ability and learning enthusiasm.

## Corpus and Vocabulary Teaching

### Vocabulary Teaching

**Vocabulary knowledge.** The importance of vocabulary to foreign language learners is self-evident. The vocabulary includes words, lexical phrases and acquired chunks while vocabulary knowledge includes forms (pronunciation and spelling), meaning, grammatical behavior, collocation with other vocabulary, frequency of use, stylistic style and register limitation. The mastery of vocabulary knowledge includes not only the mastery of vocabulary knowledge, but also the ability to use vocabulary (Luo, 2009).

The breadth and depth of vocabulary knowledge correspond to the quality and quantity. The size of vocabulary and the understanding of meaning are regarded as two important scales to measure students' vocabulary ability. Only by balancing the quality and quantity in foreign language vocabulary learning can we achieve the development of a comprehensive foreign language ability (Heikkinen *et al.*, 2000). The classification of vocabulary knowledge is shown in Table 1:

Table 1  
Vocabulary Knowledge Classification

Classification	Description
Collocations	The meaning of vocabulary is often reflected by collocation
Colligation	The use of words directly related to the grammatical category or grammatical words (especially prepositions) established grammatical patterns
Context meaning	The complete semantics of vocabulary is always closely related to context, and it is necessary to understand words through the companions of words.

**Status of vocabulary teaching in colleges and universities.** In the "University English Curriculum Teaching" promulgated by the Ministry of Education, the importance of vocabulary teaching is emphasized again and the vocabulary teaching is facing new challenges and opportunities in foreign language teaching in colleges and universities. However, the current situation of university vocabulary teaching is not optimistic:

(1) Many college English teachers still have the one-sided view that vocabulary teaching is to increase the size of vocabulary and they simply cultivate students' pronunciation, spelling and memory while paying no attention to the use of vocabulary (Lim *et al.*, 2009).

(2) Traditional vocabulary teaching methods are still popular. Teachers are still the center of the classroom while students are still in the mode of passive acceptance and learning in vocabulary learning.

(3) The online investigation of college students has shown that ability to use vocabulary has severely restricted the ability of listening, speaking, reading and writing in foreign language learning. The in-depth learning method of vocabulary needs scientific exploration.

## Corpus

**Definition.** The corpus is a real language material library established through the sampling and collection of large amount of basic information. It integrates the actual use information of language, which can be used for language research, analysis and learning. In essence, it is an electronic information database (Ohtsuki *et al.*, 1999).



Figure 1. The screenshot of BNC.

**Main categories of corpus.** The corpus can be mainly divided into a general corpus and a special corpus. The general corpus is a corpus with common learning and communication purposes. Typically, the British National Corpus, English Library, and American National Corpus. The special corpus is a corpus established for a specific research or a specific field.

A screenshot of the UK national corpus website is shown in Figure 1, which is freely available to users worldwide.

#### **Corpus-based vocabulary teaching.**

##### (1) Concordance of corpus

Concordance is the keyword in context, which refers to the concordance of a vocabulary in the corpus retrieval, through the concordance of vocabulary and phrases in the corpus, the meaning of the search terms and the collocation pattern of the search terms and their surrounding words in terms of form, meaning and function (Athanaselis *et al.*, 2011).

Through concordance, learners can be provided with a specific using context of the vocabulary, get rid of the isolated vocabulary learning state, grasp the deep connection among words, save the in-depth learning time of vocabulary and quickly grasp more lexical information.

##### (2) Data-driven learning of corpus

Traditional courses generally adopt the 3P teaching mode (Presentation-Practice-Production). Teachers, as the leader of the course, have a direct impact on the input of the course. In the data-driven learning, as a learning model of corpus exploration, teachers only play a guiding role while students, as the learning subject, discover the linguistic meaning and usage of the corpus by themselves, and then perform category learning and summarization. The data-driven learning teaching can be implemented through different teaching modes. For example, teachers can distribute the corpus handouts or students can explore the corpus by themselves. Teachers can give appropriate assistance according to the vocabulary level of learners, but learners have always been the center of vocabulary learning in data-driven learning (Thompson *et al.*, 2009).

## **Practical application of corpus vocabulary teaching**

Through the overview of the theoretical knowledge of vocabulary and corpus in the above chapters and the practical application research at home and abroad, this section analyzes the effect of the reform of foreign language vocabulary teaching for college students and the effectiveness of the in-depth learning of vocabulary based on the practical application of corpus vocabulary.

#### **Experiment design of vocabulary teaching**

**Experimental hypothesis.** The corpus vocabulary teaching method is more conducive to improving the depth of vocabulary knowledge of college students, especially lexical collocation, category connection and the understanding and application ability of vocabulary context.

The corpus vocabulary teaching method can mobilize students' independent inquiry and independent induction learning ability more efficiently.

**Experimental subjects.** There are two classes of non-English majors in a university in Fujian Province and the number of students in both classes is 43. There is no significant difference in the English vocabulary level between class 1 and class 2 in the pre-test vocabulary test. Class 1 is selected as an experimental class for corpus vocabulary teaching while Class 2 is selected as a blank class for traditional vocabulary teaching for 18 weeks of English vocabulary teaching.

**Experimental steps.** The students in the experimental group use the British National Corpus as a tool: 1. Follow and read new words and correct the pronunciation; 2. Let students read contextual concordance; 3. Form micro-texts of vocabulary corpus that covers lexical collocation, category connection, vocabulary contextual meaning; 4. Student analyze and understand the vocabulary law and do group discussion and class induction; 5. Do sentence-making to consolidate the learning.

### Experiment results of vocabulary teaching

The statistics of the post-test results of vocabulary teaching experiment are shown in Table 2.

Table 2  
*Post-testing Results of Two Classes*

Test type	Class	Number of students	Means	Standard deviation
Post-testing	Control class	43	53.9070	14.99018
	Test class	43	62.0000	15.07247

Table 3  
*Post-testing Results of Vocabulary Depth*

Test type	Collocations	Colligation	Context meaning
Control class	16.4186	15.5126	21.9767
Test class	18.750	17.7500	25.5000

It can be seen from the total vocabulary score that the vocabulary score of the experimental class is significantly better than that of the blank class, indicating that the overall teaching effect of the overall teaching reform of corpus teaching is better.

The vocabulary depth includes lexical collocation, category connection and contextual meaning. The post-test average results are shown in Table 3.

It can be seen from the table that the students in the experimental class have improved their vocabulary application ability compared with the blank class, indicating that the corpus vocabulary teaching has a positive role in improving the vocabulary depth.

After the post-test, the students in the experimental class are randomly sampled for interview. The students in the experimental group are more active in the corpus vocabulary teaching. More than 85% of the students say that the vocabulary learning is more interesting so that they are more willing to take the initiative to participate in vocabulary learning. In summary, the experimental hypothesis is demonstrated.

## Conclusion

Vocabulary teaching is an important part of foreign language learning, but the traditional vocabulary teaching method is boring and pays too much emphasis on vocabulary improvement while ignoring the contextual application of vocabulary. The vocabulary teaching of foreign language learning is in urgent need of reform. The corpus provides a new method for vocabulary learning and the researches of scholars at home and abroad have achieved certain results. This paper analyzes the effect of corpus teaching through the practical application of corpus teaching. The main research contents and conclusions of this paper are as follows:

- (1) This paper gives an overview of the basic knowledge of vocabulary learning and corpus teaching.
- (2) It is verified through practical teaching that the corpus teaching reform is better than the traditional vocabulary teaching method.
- (3) Corpus teaching has a significant improvement effect on the vocabulary depth and vocabulary ability of college students.

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