

A Blended Teaching Mode Based on Online Micro-Learning in Military English for Non-Commissioned Officers

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ABSTRACT

The rapid development of information technology has brought great impact and challenge to the traditional military English teaching. It has promoted great changes in teaching mode, teaching methods and teaching evaluation. Thus, it is an important research direction in military English teaching reform to design a blended teaching mode based on online micro-learning for non-commissioned officers, which can combine both the advantages of traditional classroom and the advantages of online teaching together. Based on this, this paper introduces a blended teaching mode based on online micro-learning in military English for non-commissioned officers, in order to improve the overall quality and English ability of non-commissioned officers.

Keywords: *blended teaching mode, online micro-learning, military English teaching*

1. INTRODUCTION

Non-commissioned officer education is an important part of military education. The task of non-commissioned officer education is to develop new high-quality military personnel to meet the needs of the information construction of our army and to win the future information war. China's armed forces are becoming increasingly powerful, with more and more new modern weapons and equipment constantly introduced into it. These new weapons and equipment need to be used and maintained by non-commissioned officers. So, it is important for the non-commissioned officers to have a good command of English, especially military English, to better serve the troops in the future. Military English is a compulsory course for all majors of non-commissioned officers. Based on the basic knowledge and application skills of English, this course aims to cultivate the non-commissioned officers to acquire a comprehensive application ability of military English, so as to prepare them for their future development and military career.

2. ANALYSIS OF THE CURRENT SITUATION MILITARY ENGLISH TEACHING FOR NON-COMMISSIONED OFFIERS

As teachers with many years of military English teaching experience, we conclude the current problems existing in military English teaching as follows.

2.1. Cadets' Basic Knowledge of English is Poor

The majority of the non-commissioned officers are high school graduates, and only a few of them graduate from colleges and universities. Besides, most of the cadets have served in the army for more than 2 years before entering the military academies for their professional learning. During their long-term training and work in the army, they have no time to continue to study English, and many of them have forgotten the basics of English. Therefore, most of them are poor in English.

2.2. Cadets' English Level Differs Greatly

As we mentioned above, some of the non-commissioned cadets are high school graduates, some are college and university graduates. The academic level among them is quite different which makes their English level varies greatly. Take the military English listening class as an example, in the class, some students can understand and follow the teacher very well, while some students may have no idea of what they are listening to, or may only understand part of them, which cause the cadets' whose English are relatively poor get more pressure in class. Some of them even give up directly. When the teacher calls their roll, they can only say a few words or simply say: "Sorry, I didn't get it." Therefore, if we choose the traditional teaching mode in military English, it is going to be very difficult to meet all the needs of cadets at different levels, which may result in some students having a weak sense of presence and less effective classroom output. The classroom atmosphere is bound to be difficult to arouse the enthusiasm of all the students.

2.3. Cadets' English Class Time is Limited

The non-commissioned officers enter the military academies for professional education, so their English class time is relatively few. Besides, the military colleges and universities are in a very special environment. Cadets have very heavy physical training tasks and complex business affairs to do in their daily routine, and the free time for them is rather few and fragmented. They can't spend much more time in learning English at a time, which makes online micro-learning suitable for them to make good use of their discrete time.

2.4. Evaluation Method is Unitary

The traditional military English for non-commissioned officers mainly uses exams to measure the quality of English teaching and cannot comprehensively evaluate the students' English application ability. As a result, students only focus on the learning of language knowledge, ignoring the development of English language skills and the overall improvement of their comprehensive application ability.

3. THEORETICAL BASIS OF BLENDED TEACHING MODE BASED ON ONLINE MICRO-LEARNING

The advent of the "Internet+" era has brought about rapid development of information and education technologies and brought tremendous impact and

challenges to traditional higher education concepts. It is promoting an all-round and profound transformation of its teaching mode, teaching methods, teaching evaluation and teaching management. At present, the most representative of this change is the blended teaching mode in recent years. The mobile, fragmented and ubiquitous features of MOOC, SPOC, micro-class, flipped classroom and other new forms of teaching not only change the way people acquire information and communicate with each other, but also change the learning mode. Micro-learning is a new learning concept that has emerged with the development of these new forms of teaching.

This concept was first proposed by Hug T^[1], an expert in learning research, in 2004. He defined micro-learning as a learning method based on small learning units and focusing on short-term learning, with "micro-content" and "learning transience" as the core elements of it. In recent years, the research on micro-learning at home and abroad has been increasing year by year, and the theory and application research and practice of micro-learning are also developing. Some scholars redefine micro-learning as a learning activity which is supported by new media and characterized by micro-content, micro-time, micro-process, micro-media and micro-resources^[2]. Some scholars believe that micro-learning has the characteristics of diverse teaching subjects, flexible learning space and time, streamlined learning content, and mobility of learning terminals^[3]. Some scholars have even summarized the characteristics of micro-learning as short time, fragmented content, and personalized learning and multi-media etc^[4].

With the development of new media, micro-learning has become a current trend. Both learning resources and the support systems tend to be miniaturized. MOOC, SPOC, Micro-class and other online teaching methods are all learning ways that can be used for online micro-learning. Since the free time for cadets are limited and fragmented, the design of non-commissioned officer military English teaching should embody the characteristics of "micro learning". The introduction of the concept of online "micro-learning" into the traditional non-commissioned English classroom can not only provide students with more shared high-quality teaching resources, such as the military background information, but also can relieve the pressure of students who can't follow teachers in class by supplementing effective input before class. It can enable the students to make good use of their fragmented free time for individualized learning. The saved classroom time can be used to design more interactive activities in class to strengthen students' understanding of key issues and promote students' effective output. The blended teaching mode based on online micro-learning can also verify the evaluation methods and establish a comprehensive evaluation system to value students' language application

ability systematically.

In a word, online “micro-learning”, as a learning method characterized by online learning and autonomous learning in an information age, breaks through the traditional closed classroom teaching mode and learning habits, making learning in fragmented time possible. It can effectively initiate students’ learning enthusiasm, develop their learning potentials, and make them learn more effectively and autonomously under the guidance, support and supervision of teachers.

4. A DESIGN OF THE BLENDED TEACHING MODE BASED ON ONLINE MICRO-LEARNING IN MILITARY ENGLISH FOR NON-COMMISSIONED OFFICERS

The blended teaching mode based on online micro-learning for non-commissioned officers refers to a mixed teaching mode combining online learning and classroom teaching. This design mainly includes the following four aspects.

4.1. Build an Online Micro-Learning Platform

To apply the blended teaching mode based online micro-learning, it requires students to learn autonomously before class. Therefore, building a platform with sufficient learning materials for students to learn is the primary problem that teachers need to design. At present, there are three modes of acquiring online teaching resources, namely using online resources built by others, using online resources built by self, and transforming others’ online resources into a suitable way ^[5]. Due to the small audience of military English, there are very few relevant few micro-media resources suitable for the learning characteristics of military cadets on both the MOOC platform of local colleges and the military vocational education network platform. Considering the current online teaching resources in military English are relatively rare, it is suggested to develop military English micro-learning teaching resources in a self-built way. According to the unit content, online resources can include word explanation, military cultural background knowledge introduction, difficult grammar or sentences interpretation as well as quizzes if possible. A military English learning WeChat group can be established to timely send these online resources to the cadets, enabling them to prepare themselves for the class by learning these resources autonomously before class. And it is recommended that the online resources should be within 5-10 minutes for the cadets’ free time is little and fragmented and the contents should cover various

modules and levels, in order to meet the different needs of cadets.

4.2. Cover Three Stages in the Process

The blended teaching mode based on online micro-learning can be divided into three stages, namely, pre-class learning, in-class learning, after-class learning. The pre-class learning is also the process of preparation [6]. During this process, teachers release the learning task list according to the teaching objectives and guide the cadets to finish these tasks and command the relative basic knowledge and background knowledge before class. Students choose to watch the online resources repeatedly or quickly according to their English level and complete the corresponding tasks and online tests. For the difficult problems they can’t solve by themselves, they can communicate with teachers or other students through WeChat learning group or other communication platform.

In-class learning is the most important stage. During this process, teachers can design some class activities such as scenario simulation, role-play, discussion, debate, and so on, in order to solve the unsolved problems or master the difficult points in class, and to inspire the cadets to explore beyond the text. With these activities and practices, students are guided to transfer their knowledge into skills and have a better understanding of the unit themes. In the whole process, teachers mainly play the role of a guide, to ensure that students at all levels can effectively output.

After-class learning is designed to consolidate the achievements in class and inspire the cadets to explore more by themselves. Teachers can give some assignments for the students. Through these assigning tasks, guide students to complete the intensive training and extended learning after-class.

4.3. Design Both On-line and Off-line Language Practice Activities

Language practice is the core of internalization of language knowledge and improvement of language skills. On the one hand, non-commissioned officer military English teaching interchanges both on-line and off-line language practice activities, so as to realize the coordination and unification of the activities in class and out of class. Through pair work, group work, class activities, make full use of students’ free time and split the comprehensive and difficult classroom practice activities (for example, task report, thematic speech) into many “micro” teachings practices, to ensure that everyone can have the “micro” task. Through this process, it not only ensures the effective implementation of classroom teaching activities, but also improves the classroom teaching

efficiency. Teaching practice activities in class mainly include mini-talk, content-based speech, task-oriented presentation, achievement display, etc. On the other hand, a variety of second class activities will be carried out, including not only the conventional competitions, such as word guessing contest, recitation contest and small speech contest, but also performance activities, such as film dialogue dubbing, singing English songs, drama role play and so on. These second classroom language activities are short, specific and easy to implement. They can greatly enhance the cadets' enthusiasm and initiative to participate in learning and play a role in promoting teaching.

4.4. Construct Diversified Evaluation System

Online micro-learning enables teachers to diversify evaluation methods, which has subverted the traditional evaluation method of judging only by the score of a final test. It allows teachers to record online learning traces and test results before class, classroom performance and quizzes in class, and the completion of homework after class, and enables teachers to track the whole process of students' learning and give them a comprehensive evaluation by combining all these performances. These formative evaluation methods focus on students' inner feeling and experience in the learning process, which can combine the teacher's evaluation, student's self-evaluation and student's mutual evaluation together and record the development and changes of the students in the learning process. Indexes such as classroom performance, unit test, oral report and learning competition can be used to evaluate students' learning process and results. And the evaluation content can involve both the basic knowledge and the skills application abilities.

5. CONCLUSION

The Blended teaching mode has attracted the attention

of educational researchers and teachers and has been widely promoted in college English teaching activities. The online micro-learning resources are short and concise, compact and concentrated, which can be quickly mastered in a short period of time. It is suitable for military students who have a short-fragmented learning time outside classroom. The Blended teaching mode based on online micro-learning changes the traditional teaching concept of making teachers as the center and textbook as the only material. It integrates the pre-class activity, in-class activity and after-class activity into a unified organism and provides students with more autonomous learning space and time. Therefore, it not only provides a new perspective for the innovation of military English learning in the new media era, but also is the best choice for the implementation of mixed teaching mode in military English.

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