

Empirical Research on Micro Course and College English Teaching

Anying Jian

Chongqing Vocational Institute of Engineering, Chongqing, 400037, China

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Abstract. With technological and economic development, micro course becomes a new teaching pattern, and received wide attention for educators. Among diversified teaching methods, micro course teaching obtained good income in college English teaching by virtue of its uniqueness and high efficiency. This paper is developed by centering on the origin and concept of micro course. The author combined the educational reform of college English, and applied micro course into teaching of college English. Moreover, the author also analyzed the features of micro course teaching, and researched design philosophy and application effect of micro course teaching mode.

Introduction

In the 21st century, information technology got rapid development. With further development of market economy, science and technology, people's pace of life is quickened day by day. At the same time, people's demands for information available at any time and at anywhere also keep continuously increasing. Microblog, WeChat, micro film, micro public service and other words entered people's life. In the teaching field, however, micro course teaching was also proposed and developed. Centering on students, micro course teaching emphasizes students' using information terminal for online learning or off-line learning with video teaching as the carrier. With deepening of the reform of college English teaching, micro course is applied into college English teaching as a new object, injecting new vitality to teaching of college English, and effectively promoting improvement to the quality of English teaching.

Origin and development of micro course

Origin of micro course

Micro course refers to video teaching developed against a certain knowledge point or teaching content within a short period of time. At the same time, it is also the sum of a series of teaching resources. It is resulted from development of information age. In the earliest, the concept of "micro course" was proposed by David Penrose, a senior instructional designer in University College of San Juan (American). According to David Penrose, the teaching contents in several dozens of minutes or even several hours can be shortened to one minute, namely "knowledge impulse". He pointed out that the construction of micro course included the following five steps: (1) list knowledge points and concepts to be taught in the classroom; (2) write an introduction to the course content not longer than half a minute; (3) video a 1-3 classroom within 1-3 minutes with microphone or camera; (4) design after-class homework, and guide students to explore for related contents; and (5) upload the teaching video and after-class homework onto teaching resource base or course management system. Such kind of micro course delivered core knowledge and improved learning efficiency within a short period of time. At the same time, it also created a good knowledge platform for students' autonomous learning. According to specific learning needs, learners can search for relevant resources through the knowledge platform, so as to achieve their learning goals. In the whole teaching process, students are learning in class with high summary and rigorous logics. Their attention is concentrated on core contents. In traditional teaching classroom with a long teaching time, it is difficult for students to concentrate their attention or accurately master key points and core concepts.

Development of micro course

The teaching method of micro course is the reform and development of classroom teaching method based on traditional course teaching by combining modern information technology and current educational environment. In China, some advanced educators introduced the concept of western micro course teaching, and positively explored for and discussed micro course. Hu Tiesheng (director of Guangdong Foshan Teaching and Educational Information Center) proposed application research on “micro course” (Hu Tiesheng: 61-65). He pointed out new view on the concept of “micro course”. He thought that “micro course” took micro teaching video as the carrier and that teachers made teaching knowledge points, difficult points and doubtful points into video courses available for online learning or off-line learning. The content is short, which is helpful for students’ autonomous learning and individualized learning. Li Yuping is the first batch of persons who applied micro course into primary and secondary school teaching (Li Yuping: 15). Li Yuping researched and expanded material sources and involving range of micro course, and preliminarily established related micro course websites. Moreover, Li Yuping also provided rich micro course video resources, and aroused the nationwide research and discussion of micro course. At the same time, study and research of micro course entered the exploratory and practice stage in China. Professor Li Jiahou from Shanghai Normal University led his postgraduate team to develop research and exploration for micro course (Li Jiahou: 20). In several pilot elementary and secondary schools in Minhang District of Shanghai, Li Jiahou developed teaching and researching activity of “educational reform boosted by micro course”, promoting enrichment and completion of the theory of micro course teaching.

Reasons for birth of micro course

Micro course was emerged with the times of educational information and network digitalization. Reasons for its birth are also issues worthy of discussion. According to the author, there are the following three reasons: (1) with wide application of internet technology, big data age derived from mass information resulted in the “attention pattern” of mass communication. However, classroom video resources cannot get rid of traditional teaching mode in the past; (2) scientific and technological progress resulted in numerous educational resources. As a result, the phenomenon of “excess” took place. Moreover, it is low for actual utilization of educational resources; and (3) in the new age, LAN and wireless network become increasingly popular. There are diversified types of mobile terminal. As a result, great changes took place in people’s communication mode. People gradually get used to fragmental and situational communication patterns, such as microblog and WeChat. Micro course is used to explain a question in 10 minutes, allocate learning activities for students, and motivate students’ learning initiative. Actually, it complies with the transmission mode of attention pattern. At the same time, it also highly summarizes and effectively delivers learning contents and core knowledge points.

Concept of micro course

According to its cause, background and development process, micro course can be abstractly defined as follows: by observing people’s expressions and experiences in practical activities and according to rules for human emotion of emotion, highly summarize skill, knowledge and emotional experience, and utilize modern multimedia equipment for high-efficiency transmission. Abstract definition of micro course represents its internal rule and value. Specifically, it represents actual operation process of micro course. With video teaching as the carrier, micro course combines core knowledge, operating process, after-class task and other links according to micro learning theory, making it convenient for students’ online learning and off-line learning through mobile terminal or other similar modes. Micro course includes its core component (micro video) and such teaching links as micro teaching plan, micro exercise, micro feedback and micro reflection. They are organically combined together, thus forming a complete teaching video resource system. Various links of micro course allow learning contents and learning objects to be combined together. Thus, students’ attention is concentrated, and a kind of more convenient, more effective and more individualized learning experience is brought to students. In college English teaching, application of micro course

integrates complicated English resources, influentially promoting effective utilization of English resources. Students can develop individualized learning according to specific characteristics. At the same time, improvement is also made to enthusiasm of students' autonomous learning, letting students transform from "ask me to learn" to "I want to learn". In the exploration process of micro course, teachers' research level is also improved. At the same time, teachers also had further understanding of students' needs, and perceived rules for students' cognition of emotion, so as to perform theme-based micro course teaching according to students' questions, supplement regular classroom knowledge for students, and improve teaching achievement and teaching quality.

Features of micro course

According to abstract definition and specific description of micro course, we can summarize the following characteristics of micro course:

Short teaching time

Traditional classroom teaching lasts for 45 minutes. It is very difficult for students to concentrate their attention. Once knowledge is too complicated, it will be difficult for students to master core knowledge points. On the one hand, "micro" in micro course is reflected in teaching time. Teaching video is approximately controlled within 10 minutes. The teaching time is short, but the content is refined. It is easier for students to concentrate their attention on core concepts, which is helpful for students to master key knowledge points in a short period of time and for knowledge structuring.

Clear-cut theme of teaching content

In micro course, teaching system with rigorous logics and complete structure is cut into various knowledge segments. Its purpose is to focus on teaching activities of a certain knowledge point or teaching link. Each course has its own theme. Compared with traditional classroom, micro course can highlight the teaching theme in a better way. Under assistance of multimedia and other means, teachers can develop teaching activities by centering on specific knowledge points. Students' learning initiative is redeployed. Although micro course is short and simple, necessary teaching procedures must be finished. Teachers cannot explain only for simple knowledge point. On the contrary, teachers should go forward one by one and follow teaching rules.

Convenient use of teaching resources

Core components of micro course include a series of short and simple video & audio resources. Network technological development shortened the volume of video & audio resources. More importantly, such resources are made to be more applicable to be played on mobile terminals, including mobile phone, PSP, tablet PC and pocket learning computer, making students not to be restrained by time and space any more and making it possible for learning at any time and at any where. Open classes of various world-famous colleges and universities were uploaded onto the Internet free of charge, students and teachers can find resources in their needs, and download relevant videos and audio files according to their interest and characters. Thus, learning is not confined to domestic resources any more. Instead, teachers and students can enjoy open classes of famous colleges and universities in the world. Sharing of teaching resources and online learning are inexorable trends of future education.

Contextual learning resources

Micro course includes teaching video resources aided by scientific and technological means. At the same time, it also integrates such elements as teaching courseware, multimedia material, exercise feedback and professional evaluation, making it form a combined system with clear-cut theme, rich resources and clear structure, creating a contextual learning platform for students' autonomic learning, presenting a networked classroom for students, and bringing forth real learning experiences to students. Generally speaking, micro course is short and simple in content and compact in structure when compared with traditional classroom teaching. Micro course delivers teaching resources by virtue of modern multimedia network technology, and occupies advantages in both time and space. Therefore, application of micro course in college English teaching plays a positive role in promoting students' comprehensive competence of listening, speaking, reading and writing.

Design on college English micro course

To conform to the needs of information age, the reform of college English teaching is also gradually developed. However, application of micro course is of great significance for college English teaching. Therefore, it is necessary for us to think about construction of micro course and its countermeasures. Although micro course is short and simple in content, its production process is uneasy. Several steps should be followed. For further description, the author will take as an example the production process of micro course of job and careers in Unit 2 of Volume II of *Integrated Course of College Experience English*.

Topic and design of micro course

To design a micro course of college English teaching with rigorous logics and complete structure, we should first determine the topic of micro course. Topic selection mainly includes the part of skill training in teaching materials and training language skill. For unit topics in teaching materials, teaching should be developed by centering on theme contents. For cultural background of unit topics, cultural connotation should be expanded. After determining topics of micro course, teachers should also perform scheme design and material collection. While designing teaching plan of micro course, teachers should determine teaching target, teaching purpose and teaching media according to the intention of topic selection, making design plan closely correlated with the theme. Thus, teachers can roundly explain knowledge points in a short period of time, making students digest and absorb knowledge also in a short period of time, so as to meet the needs of learners. In scheme design, the scheme should be completed by collecting materials related to the theme, making short and simple micro course achieve the optimal teaching effect. For instance, teachers should first determine the theme as “job and careers” while making micro course in the unit of “job and careers”. Teaching purpose is to make students to have a preliminary understanding of vocabularies related to job and careers, listen to and speak out those vocabularies and sentence patterns for job and career description, and present their own opinions on job and careers. At the same time, teachers should collect relevant materials (such as pictures and movie & video materials) by centering on job and careers.

Video production and development

Teaching media design is a key factor for micro course to finally realize perfect presentation. Therefore, micro course videos must be carefully produced and developed. Micro course videos can be presented in diversified forms, mainly including producing-type micro course, screen-type micro course, software synthesis type micro course and mixed micro course. To enhance teaching effect, the mode of audio-visual presentation is adopted. Besides, software can be used for synthesis of micro course, namely the mode of combining video with PPT play. Screen-type software can be used for micro course video producing and editing, such as Camtasia Studio, kinescope recording expert or snagit. For better presentation of teaching process, subtitles can be properly added. While preparing for PPT, teachers should pay attention to simple and clear-cut design on PPT. It is not recommend using many colors. Composing should be layered. At last, teachers should combine relevant preparations to make PPTs, properly perform environmental debugging, and get familiar with lecture notes, so as to automatically produce micro course video. While making PPTs themed as “job and careers”, teachers should spend 5 seconds in presenting micro course information and 10-20 seconds in circumstance importing. Moreover, teachers should utilize movie and video materials related to job and careers to lead the theme in, such as *Pursuit of Happiness*. Then, teachers should add related pictures to the words, such as the picture of policeman for the career of police. In the recording process, teachers should ask more elicitation questions, so as to stimulate students’ interests, such as “what would you do in the future?” and “why do you like the job?” After watching this micro course, students will actively find more materials about job and careers, and get well prepared or formal classroom learning.

Teaching feedback

To understand actual conditions of students after watching micro course, teachers should observe students’ completion of micro course tasks according to practical teaching, so as to observe actual effect of micro course in college English teaching. At the same time, teachers can communicate with

students in or after class. In return, students should give their opinions and views about the design on micro course. Teachers should put forward doubts or difficulties, discuss with other teachers and then research and develop new design plans. After watching the micro course themed as “job and careers”, students should finish relevant micro course tasks, and give feedback in the classroom. In class, teachers should develop activities related to job and careers, observe students’ classroom performance, evaluate actual effect of micro course, and finally make reflection and summary. At the same time, teachers should also find out and solve relevant issues.

Conclusion

To sum up, research and application of micro course are still in the stage of preliminary exploration in China. In contemporary college English teaching, however, it is of great significance for research and discussion of micro course. Micro course is characterized with short volume, convenient use and contextual teaching, conforming to the needs of contemporary information education. Students and teachers can benefit from micro course. Therefore, we should learn from previous teaching experiences, and make in-depth research on practical significance and teaching philosophy of micro course, so as to promote further improvement to the overall level of college English teaching in China.

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