

The Application of Microlesson in the Teaching of College English Reading

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Abstract. The study analyzes the existing problems of microlesson in the teaching of college English reading and accordingly put forward several possible strategies to cope with the problems, involving choosing an appropriate subject, working out diverse supporting classroom activities, and establishing an effective assessment system.

Introduction

In the context of information age, the informationization of higher education teaching has been proposed as an essential national strategy, which attaches great importance to improving college teachers' literacy of information technology and students' learning autonomy in digital online education. Microlesson, for instance, has been introduced from abroad and prevailed in China in recent years, posing a severe challenge on the current conventional teaching philosophy and patterns.

The definition of microlesson still varies among scholars and teachers. Basically it is defined as a course based on a very short but integrated video which is made by the teacher himself. The short video, better no longer than ten minutes, usually concentrates on a specific knowledge unit, for students to watch and learn on their own before class. And in class the teacher will design various teaching activities centering around this short video.

1. Existing Problems of Microlesson in College English Reading Teaching

In terms of college English reading teaching, microlesson has rapidly gained popularity nationwide, and quite a few influential national microlesson contests have been successfully held by established institutions in the late three years. Nevertheless, as a relatively brand-new teaching philosophy and pattern from abroad, it still remains at the preliminary stage in Chinese college English reading teaching, and much exploration has yet to be undertaken. Based on the online microlesson video courses and teaching practice, there mainly remain several challenging problems.

Above all, some teachers have misunderstandings about the objective and principle of a microlesson video. An effective microlesson video should be not only short but also focused and integrated, with an aim to explicitly and vividly explain the key points or the difficult points in a teaching unit. However, many microlesson videos seem more like a short lead-in PPT-based video, without an explicit purpose, a focused knowledge unit, a compact structure, and a couple of thought-provoking questions. As a consequence, the advantages of microlesson video are not capable of being brought into full play.

On the other hand, on the students' part, they have been accustomed to the conventional way of learning, thus lacking a strong will of learning autonomy and involvement in classroom activities. College students in China tend to spend less time in making preparation for class, and in class they are inclined to be passively enough to depend heavily on teacher's lecture. Consequently, the students' interest in microlesson teaching is easy to be aroused for a short time. However, it might be rather tough to remain sustainable.

2. Possible Strategies of Microlesson

To bring the advantages of a microlesson into full play in college English reading teaching, some strategies might be taken into account.

2.1 Choose an Appropriate Subject

As a learning resource, it has to be admitted that microlesson is not a universal solution and not all teaching contents are suitable for a microlesson video. A foreign language may generally involve linguistic knowledge, micro-language skills and non-linguistic knowledge. As far as college English reading is concerned, three aspects of teaching contents could be chosen. Firstly, the leading-in introduction of the background knowledge is particularly suitable to make a microlesson video, which is capable of not only arousing students' earnest interest but also enhancing their humanity cultivation. The essence of learning a foreign language is learning a culture of a distinct people other than ourselves. In addition, in taking time presenting the background of different cultures, a microlesson video is at its best for its explicitness, vividness, and entertainment. The background knowledge of a text involves such diverse aspects as history and politics, ideology and values, religion and beliefs, social customs and life styles, etc. For instance, in the third edition of *New Horizon College English* (Book Four), the theme topic of Unit 5 is "Why culture counts", and the text "Speaking Chinese in America" is to be discussed in class. Thus it is advisable for the teacher to choose cross-cultural topics and put forward a couple of thought-provoking questions for students to deliberate, concerning the profound impact of culture on a successful cross-cultural communication, the negative consequences of stereotypes and misunderstandings between different cultures, and so on.

Secondly, vocabulary explanation is fitting in a microlesson video as well. Most Chinese college students have a poor amount of vocabulary, which makes them unable to understand the language materials accurately and deeply, or to read a passage fluently. On the other hand, many students memorize words in a mechanical manner, which is not effective and efficient. While in a microlesson video, the teacher can vividly and systematically show students how to memorize vocabulary in a scientific way, for instance, to introduce the knowledge of word formation in English words, including roots and affixation. Besides, to be more effective and appealing, teachers can also integrate microlesson video with some applications of vocabulary-memorizing which are quite popular among college students. For instance, the elements of word TV and word games in these applications might be included in a microlesson video to arouse students' interest.

Thirdly, a microlesson video might cover the reading skills, grammar knowledge and text understanding, which are usually the key points of English reading class, and at the same time, normally call for long hours to grasp. Besides, it might be sensible to integrate the microlesson video with the application of "Mind Map". It has to be admitted that a microlesson video usually focuses on a particular piece of knowledge, thus lacking a systematic and macroscopic vision. However, the Mind Map is a desirable supplement in that it is capable of forming an explicit network by presenting the interrelationship among each level of knowledge. In terms of English reading, the teacher can demonstrate clearly in the video how to grasp the structure of the text by drawing a framework in the mind map application.

2.2 Devise Diverse Supporting Class Activities

It is highly vital to integrate the microlesson video with diverse supporting students-centered class activities, such as group discussion, oral report, role-play, and so on, thus formulating a pack of topic-based teaching resource. In this sense, a good microlesson video is merely the first step to launch, based on which the ultimate teaching objectives are to be achieved.

According to the theory of processing memory in cognitivism, learning involves two essential activities: "encoding" and "retrieval", which mean inputting information into one's brain and withdrawing the information from the memory bank respectively. In the study of Jeffrey D. Karpicke, it is demonstrated that repetitive retrievals are capable of strengthening people's memory, thus improving their learning performance. In terms of a class based on microlesson video, it is

advisable to devise more class activities and exercises to fulfill students' "retrieval" as many times as possible.

This is particularly significant in China's college English teaching, since the conventional college English class in China usually centers around teachers' lecture on vocabulary, grammar and text analysis. As Wen Qiufang has pointed out that China's traditional classroom of English teaching is characterized by input as the objective and output as the supporting means. While she further puts forward a new hypothesis pattern of "output as the driving force and input as the facilitator", in which output is placed as the highlight since it is both the ultimate objective and the driving force of foreign language acquisition.

While the various supporting class activities and exercises enable more output activities by students, through which they are encouraged to "retrieve" from their knowledge based on the microlesson video and thus form a meaningful language output. In this process of repetitive retrievals and output, students not only manage to construct and internalize the inputting knowledge, but also effectively enhance their linguistic skill and independent thinking.

2.3 Establish a Comprehensive Assessment System

Given the fact that Chinese college students tend to have a less strong learning autonomy, and many of them are reluctant to participate in classroom activities, it is critical to establish an effective assessment system to monitor and initiate them. Besides, the assessment system of a conventional class definitely doesn't meet the demand of that of a modern class based on microlesson video.

The set of assessment system should be both specific and comprehensive, based on the teaching objectives and students' academic level. Furthermore, the evaluation should be abundant in contents as well as diversified in means. On one hand, the evaluation might concern students' oral report, discussion, writing, video, etc. to assess their linguistic skills as well as critical thinking, teamwork, and innovation; on the other hand, the evaluation should involve both qualitative and quantitative, both summative and formative, individual performance as well as group performance. Finally, it is necessary to devise specific evaluation sheets and set up a performance file for each student.

Conclusion

Microlesson is no universal replacement of conventional college English reading teaching. And there still remain a number of puzzling challenges and problems in this teaching pattern, which deserves further discussion and exploration. Nevertheless, its distinct advantages cannot be ignored in promoting students' learning autonomy and optimizing teaching results. In fulfilling this, teachers need to make great efforts in integrating learning resources, devising teaching strategies, as well as establish an effective assessment system.

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