

MICRO LESSON FOR COLLEGE ENGLISH TEACHING IN CHINA: APPLICATION
AND CHANGELLENGES

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Abstract

MICRO LESSON FOR COLLEGE ENGLISH TEACHING IN CHINA:

APPLICATION AND CHANGELLENGES

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Under the Supervision of Dong Isbister, PhD

Micro lesson has been widely used in all levels of education in China. Many teachers think it plays an important role in language teaching, especially in college English teaching, and believe this approach will become a major teaching tool. Some educators, however, argue that the role of micro lesson has been exaggerated and it has its own weaknesses (Zhang, 2017).

This paper aims to take micro lesson used in College English teaching as an example to discuss the pros and cons of this teaching approach in China. It first discusses the development and features of micro lesson in English teaching in universities in China and analyzes its current situation. It then illustrates that micro lesson doesn't completely have positive effect on College English teaching as expected. Finally, the paper reflects on that situation and calls for more research to help raise awareness that micro lesson has its own significance and application challenges.

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Chapter I Introduction

In 2003, the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China officially launched the reform of college English teaching (Wang & Wang, 2011) and required that College English teaching should serve to train college students who will be able to use the English language to complete a wide range of tasks in different areas after they graduate. The call for reform has inevitably posed a demand for pedagogical changes. Many teachers have reflected on the effectiveness of traditional teaching methods, such as “grammar translation, audio-lingual and audio-visual methods” (Chen 1988, p. 90), and started to apply some new teaching methods in response to the reform and curriculum change. Micro lesson happens to be one of the methods recently utilized in College English teaching. Teachers using the method to teach English have tried to engage their students in activities in class, believing that micro lesson is a more effective method. Other teachers, however, think that the role of micro lesson can be limiting and should not be used alongside some other teaching methods.

Statement of the Problem

Just like what has been mentioned above, many College English teachers have used micro lesson as a new approach in class, believing it really has had positive impacts on college English teaching in China (Chen, 2019). This caused others to believe its effectiveness and apply micro lesson in their English class without considering their student population, curriculum difference, and student learning outcomes. So, here is a problem that we should reflect on, “how effective is micro lesson in College English teaching?”

Definition of Terms

Micro lesson

It is also called micro-lecture or micro-teaching, which is actual instructional content that is formatted for online and mobile learning by using a constructivist approach. A micro lesson is used to convey learning points and knowledge in the format of pre-recorded lectures or PowerPoint slides. Students are required to study learning points and knowledge before going to class (Cao 2017).

Micro lessons are approximately 60 second presentations with a specific structure. They are not just brief (one minute) presentations. As a teaching method, micro lesson was proposed by David Penrose, a senior teaching designer and college online service manager in New Mexico San Juan College in the US in 2008. Since then, it has been widely used in college teaching in the United States, and adopted by many teachers in other countries as well. By the time micro lesson was introduced into China, the length of a micro lecture has been extended from 60 seconds to around 5 - 8 minutes, normally no more than 10 minutes in order for teachers to deliver more content and learning points (Yang, 2016; Zhan, 2017).

College English

College English is a required English course for non-English majors in colleges and universities in China. Students are required to take English courses, such as intensive reading and listening, to improve their skills in reading, writing, listening and speaking. This course is aimed at the undergraduate students in university who need to take about one and a half or two years' basic College English course. After one and a half or two years' learning, students need to take the standardized National College English Test Band 4 (CET-4), a test designed to “examine the

effect of graded teaching” (Xu and Fan, 2016, p. 267).

Purpose of the Study

The primary goal of this research paper is to explain to College English instructors and graduate students interested in teaching English to non-native speakers. Namely, micro lesson has its own qualities but also limitations and needs to be utilized more productively.

Significance of the Study

This research paper will help English teachers or educators to know that teaching methods, such as micro lesson, should be adopted and applied in line with curriculum requirement, type of class, student population, and student learning outcomes. Namely, people should see pros and cons of employing it in English teaching. The paper will provide an analytical framework for other researchers who want to continue with their research on the application of micro lesson. In addition, it will discuss strategies for using micro lesson in College English teaching and improving teaching effectiveness.

Methodology

This research paper is based on library research, and all the sources come from the articles by other researchers or educators in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) education for college students.

First, the research paper focuses on the application and challenges of micro lesson for College English teaching in China, and most sources will be about micro-teaching, especially about the application of micro lesson.

Next, relevant sources will be identified to help explain strengths and weaknesses of micro lesson used in EFL teaching.

Finally, a comparative analysis of the selected sources will be conducted and implications based on personal teaching experience will be discussed.

Chapter II Review of Literature

1. Reform of College English Teaching in China

With the development of science and technology since China carried out its open-door policy in 1978, there has been a high demand of people who are able to communicate with English speakers and use English for work, business, and research. In the mid-1980s, College English became a required two-year language course for non-English majors. The traditional mode of education, namely, cramming method of teaching, couldn't satisfy demands for teaching and learning effectiveness. Just like Ruan and James (2009) mentioned in their article that the key factors that pushed College English in China to the stage of reform were globalization, student challenges, expansion of enrolment and primary and high school coordination challenge. The most important reason or the major objective was to develop students' English comprehension and communicative competence, which was also the main aim of College English teaching reform in China. That is to say, English teachers not only paid much more attention to the basic ability but also needed to improve the college students' practical ability.

Zhang and Wang (2016) stated that foreign language teaching should focus on the cultivation of students' communication ability. This was also discussed in the article written by Yao (2011), who argued that College English teaching in China had its problems. Namely, some traditional teaching methods didn't work well in class. She also explained that the teaching methods used in College English teaching hindered the improvement of the students' English when they reached an advanced level. Many students performed well while in college, but lacked the ability to communicate in English after their graduation. That also meant what they had

learned in college was not practical and useful enough. In order to achieve the goal that college students learn to use the English language effectively, educators needed to change the traditional teaching mode and adopt teaching methods that can enhance student's learning experience and help achieve that goal.

2. Current Situation of College English Teaching in China

2.1 Progress of College English Teaching

At present, many universities in big cities have adopted some new teaching approaches to arouse students' interest in learning English. With the development of modern technology, multimedia has been widely used in English class. At the same time, College English teachers have adopted specific teaching approaches, such as micro lesson, MOOCs, flipped classroom (Zhang & Zhang, 2018), to improve teaching effectiveness and students' learning outcomes.

When exchanging in some domestic forum or conferences, teachers in many universities shared their experiences with one other about the performance of their students, which showed that College English teaching has made progress and achievements. This was the strength of integrating modern technology and new teaching mode into instructional activities. Even in some vocational colleges where English is a two-year required course, English teachers have applied new teaching approaches to stimulate and cultivate students to improve their abilities in listening, speaking, reading, writing, and translation. After about two years of coursework, students' basic and practical abilities have been improved, and this could be proved in the final exam or other formal English exams. So, many educators have seen the progress of College English teaching after the reform has been carried out.

2.2 Weaknesses of College English Teaching

Many teachers or researchers have used College English teaching as an example to share their own views on weaknesses of College English teaching.

Guo (2018) stated that many college students had bad learning outcomes because they lacked initiative and self-motivation. College English was required in universities in China. If a student wanted to go to college, he or she must pass the National College Entrance Examination (NCEE). Although some freshmen's ability could help them get enrolled in college, they still had some problems in learning English. For instance, limited vocabulary, poor listening or reading skills, and lack of motivation have imposed challenges on effective learning and teaching. Mu (2017) also mentioned the disadvantages of College English teaching and gave several aspects in detail.

The first contributing factor is the teaching mode. Mu suggested that it lacked the novelty and originality, which made the students difficult in increasing their interest in learning English or even using the language. Some English teachers kept talking and didn't give students enough time to practice or express themselves.

Another factor is motivation. Some teachers and students aimed at exams not application. When in middle school, many students were told by their teachers and believed that they could learn very well and easily in university as long as they remembered the important points and some difficult structures then. After entering university, English teachers didn't help them to change their views on learning. So, the students thought they could make it as long as they passed the final or formal exam.

In addition, English teachers had to finish certain content in one or two class periods. It caused that many students didn't acquire what they wanted.

3. Application of Micro lesson in China

In order to change the traditional teaching mode and achieve the goal of College English, micro lesson has been widely used in College English teaching in China.

3.1 Application of Micro lesson in College English Teaching

Here, some characteristics of micro lesson should be mentioned to show that micro lesson have been applied widely in college in China, combined with the impact of it.

First and foremost, micro lesson had its flexibility in teaching. Students could preview recorded content for learning points, such as grammar, theories, and concepts, before going to class. When in class, teachers would spend more time asking questions related to the content displayed in the video and students could also have enough time to practice. This was a chance for teachers to check out whether or not the students had learned the language points well. On the other hand, more and more students could get involved in class activities by using what they had learned. What English teachers did was to guide and help students analyze what they had done. So, this was a good way to ensure teaching effectiveness and improve the students' learning outcomes (Tian & Lu, 2016). The whole teaching process was much better than before.

Secondly, one of micro-lesson's characteristics was that it lasted one minute, which was very short and focused on one learning point. It helped to simplify the whole process of teaching. Considering that some college students had poor foundation of language and interest in studying, micro lesson could give them more time to preview the language points repeatedly. For example, when developing a curriculum design, an English teacher could make several short videos to ask the students to learn some new words or basic language points. Through micro lesson, the teacher gave students more space to study what they wanted to know in other places. Students didn't have to sit in the classroom and listen to what a teacher talked all along in class, which

made them bored and lose some confidence in English. Through micro lesson, students could increase their interest in studying and feel free to get more knowledge of what they needed to acquire. That was an easy way for them to learn what they should do and they would become more active in class.

Thirdly, the flexibility of micro lesson could help to cultivate the students to get the ability of self-learning. Micro lesson required the students to learn by themselves so the students didn't have to wait for the teachers to ask them to do so. They could choose when they needed to finish learning and ask their peers to help them with some difficult or important language points. This was a useful process of studying because the students could improve their ability of self-learning, analyzing and comprehending. At the same time, they could increase their awareness of team work through discussing with their classmates. After that, they would get the ability of being active, exploring and thinking. Eventually their practical ability of communicating and exchanging with other people would be improved, which was beneficial for their work and daily life in the future. This was the final goal of education that our English teachers should achieve.

Fourthly, traditional teaching mode needed teachers to talk in class and their students to listen to them, which was called a negative process of teaching and studying. That would cause the students to lose their interest in English and even give it up at last. Compared with old teaching mode, micro lesson gave different way of learning and studying that an English teacher made the video ahead and the students should learn by themselves before class. What had been displayed in the video was vivid and direct. So, the students would feel it was original and well directed, and that would arouse the students' curiosity and interest (Wang, 2017). A visual lesson could lay foundation for the coming class and ensure that English teacher would instruct their

students more creatively in class since the students had got ready for it in advance. For example, if a teacher tried to talk about several traditional festivals in China, he or she wanted the students to finish previewing some important points about the Chinese festivals, such as origins of the festivals, date of celebration and so on. He or she could put these in the videos creatively. So, the students would see the videos with interest or curiosity, which could also improve the students' learning outcomes. This was the fact that the development of technology gave English teaching the media of creative performance.

Fifthly, the development of web made micro lesson come true. It helped to accomplish the aim of effective extension of learning knowledge. It meant that students didn't have to only sit in the classroom to learn what their teacher asked them to do. They could choose the appropriate place they liked to acquire the knowledge related to their major, and use the right way to study at the right time. The combination of learning knowledge before or after class and practice of language points in class gave the teachers and students more chance to communicate, interact and answer questions existed in the process of teaching and learning. What's more, teachers would understand the students' problems of online learning and instruct them to understand some language points better by repeating or analyzing them again in class. This was a kind of progress of language teaching. Through this, quality and effectiveness of teaching would be improved. Thus, the advance of web led the College English teaching to a better stage.

Finally, micro lesson not only changed the old teaching mode but also brought a new concept of education. At the same time, micro lesson required the College English teachers to have some skills in designing and making it because teachers were the main designers and makers of it. For instance, many different regional and national contests have been organized in recent years. Many participants, who were also English teachers, showed their skills in designing

and making micro lessons and also demonstrated that micro lesson was applicable and had a lot of room to develop. Therefore, if they want to give students some new and special contents of English language, they needed to be good at operating and making micro lesson (Wang, 2017).

Thus, when a teacher could master a kind of new skill, it was a self-improvement too. He or she would become more enthusiastic and creative in teaching English, which would improve the quality of teaching, the students' outcomes and eventually the practical ability that students use English language. All these had positive impact on the instruction of College English.

According to the impact and advantages mentioned above, micro lesson did have a good effect on the teaching of College English because it has changed the roles of teacher and student, gave a new way of interaction between teacher and student, and made the English teaching more authentic and practical. That was the reason that many people said micro lesson not only changed the mode of education implemented for many years but also gave the original idea of teaching and instruction in modern times in China. It was worth paying much more attention to and spreading in our country.

3.2 Challenges of Micro lesson in College English Teaching

Although the application of micro lesson and its impact discussed above has been huge, there were still some challenges that it faced in the process of application, which were mentioned by other educators.

Some educators believed that it was a kind of setback that many students spent more time learning online. It reduced the chance that teachers communicated with students face to face because all students could do was sitting in front of a computer and facing it without interacting with their teachers and classmates in person. Just like what Yang (2016) said, learning through a

computer individually had a negative effect on the connection between teachers and students emotionally. The atmosphere of learning couldn't compare with that in an actual class. It would lower the efficiency of learning to some extent. Some teachers also raised this question and argued if micro lesson should be promoted widely in China.

In addition, a teacher using traditional delivery method designed every single in-class activity before going to class. However, a teacher using the micro lesson method prepared a recorded, short video for students, which would divide the whole structure of knowledge into individual parts and the whole learning system was cut into pieces. It would unquestionably disrupt the framework of language learning. If students failed to catch the main goal of learning in a micro lesson, they would not be able to answer the teachers' questions and practice correctly in class. That would cause the waste of time and effort, which had a bad influence on students' performance in class and also affected the process of teaching.

Another challenge is from students' learning styles. Many college students had been influenced by the traditional teaching mode for a long time since they began to learn English in primary school. So, they believed it was a habit to listen to a teacher and take in what he or she taught in class. On the other hand, some students lacked independence and the ability of self-learning (Zhang, 2017). If they couldn't learn the micro lesson by themselves and kept asking their teacher questions, there would no effectiveness of learning at all because the time for a teacher to stay online was limited. Moreover, there was another factor that should be noticed. If some students' ability of learning were too limited, it would cause them to copy or deal with lessons freely. That would also have negative effect on teaching effectiveness in class. Therefore, there would be no student's learning outcome and the micro lesson would be a kind of failure. Access and resources in different university also impose challenges. For instance, some top

universities in big cities had what teachers and students want in class (Yu, 2010). By contrast, some colleges in small cities had limited resources so that it was hard to guarantee that the teachers and students would have a good environment to use stable technology or to share a platform of online teaching with others. Therefore, teachers had to finish their lessons by using traditional teaching methods in class and students still had the old way of learning. It was really hard to achieve the goal that colleges and universities had the same distribution of rich resources in education in most of places in China.

Finally, depending on micro lesson alone would make teaching methods dull in English class. Many educators thought that traditional teaching methods should be combined with new ones and applied them appropriately if possible. Ignoring the traditional education completely didn't help us to get better results in the process of teaching.

Summary

Traditional teaching methods and new ones are mutually inclusive. For instance, a College English teacher made some videos about basic language points that most of the students could take in and asked the students to learn by themselves before class. When beginning to teach some day, he or she could take several minutes to repeat the points to remind the students of the important or difficult ones so that the students could get what they should master. Then, the teacher asked them to answer some questions and practice, which could help them to consolidate some knowledge. This was a good way to improve teaching effectiveness and students' learning outcomes.

According to the factors mentioned above, the challenges of using the micro lesson method still existed in College English teaching in many places in China, which was not an

individual case. Applying micro lesson as a new teaching approach didn't mean that other teaching methods had to be replaced completely.

Chapter III Conclusions and Recommendations

As a recently adopted and adapted method in College English teaching in China, micro lesson was popular with many educators in universities and colleges. They advocated that micro lesson should be the representative of new teaching mode. However, what they had to see was that some real factors restricted the application and development of micro lesson in China. After all, traditional teaching methods are still useful and proven to be effective in lecture and content-based courses. Evaluating the application of micro lesson and assessing challenges carefully could help educators to apply it more effectively in the future education. It could also help College English teachers to improve the effectiveness of teaching and students' learning outcomes.

In the future, micro lesson will be worth of research because it can be useful and practical for our College English teaching though it has its own challenges at present. Maybe researchers will meet with many difficulties in the coming day. They could establish a comprehensive system of evaluation to solve the problems in the process of study. Combined with many experiences and real cases that educators get in practice, the researchers can have more effective outcomes and serve for the further research concerning micro lesson.

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