

A Study of the Production-oriented Approach-based Application of Micro-lecture in a College Oral English Course in the Blended Teaching and Learning Environment

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Abstract

The emergence and development of micro-lecture are promoted by the blended teaching and learning environment. Micro-lecture has been widely applied to college English teaching. It improves learning efficiency resulting from highlighting the focus of teaching and enhances interest in learning resulting from an active teaching atmosphere. It also features flexible regulation of learning time and emphasis on students' autonomous learning. The application of micro lecture, in the motivating, enabling, and assessing stages of the Production-oriented Approach (POA) embedded in a college oral English course in the blended teaching and learning environment, can enhance teacher-student collaboration as well as the teacher's leading role and scaffolding, so as to promote effective learning. The combination of micro-lecture with POA is promising, but it also brings challenges. Future research can address these challenges by centering on the ways to improve students' learning ability and learning autonomy, the proper evaluation of the efficacy of micro-lectures, and the proper adjustment of discourse in micro-lecture teaching.

Keywords

Micro-lecture, POA, Blended teaching and learning

1. Advantages of Micro-lecture Applied to College English Teaching

The blended teaching and learning environment has been playing an important role in English education. It integrates online and offline resources, provides students with access and flexibility, and improves the effectiveness of students' learning (Ferreira, Salinas, & Morales, 2014). Since the introduction of the Chinese Ministry of Education's Opinions on Strengthening the Application and Management of Online Open Course Construction in Colleges and Universities (OME, 2015), the blended teaching and learning environment based on micro-lectures has been widely used in the process of college English teaching reform in China. The application of this teaching mode is mainly reflected in students' use of micro-lectures for autonomous learning before and after class, their completion of exercises or output tasks before and after class, and teachers' use of the network platform for monitoring and assessment before and after class; teachers and students' use of micro-lectures to conduct in-depth discussions on important topics in class and teachers' implementation of heuristic teaching and provision of feedback in class (Li, Jia, & Jiang, 2022). The advantages of applying micro-lecture

to college English teaching are reflected in the following aspects.

1.1 Improvement of Learning Efficiency Resulting from Highlighting the Focus of Teaching

The theme of micro-lecture is generally an important knowledge point or a practice of listening and speaking in the process of English teaching. The independence, integrity, and exemplariness of the micro-lecture content can help students clearly understand the key and difficult points of the course (Liu, 2019). At the same time, the content of the micro-lecture is featured with fragmentation. The length of micro-lecture video can be as short as 3-5 minutes and as long as 20 minutes while in many cases, maintained at about 10 minutes. Research shows that students' attention is relatively concentrated in a comparatively short period of time. Therefore, the length of the micro-lecture is obviously in line with this learning characteristic of students and can, therefore, promote students' mastery of the knowledge they have learned, enhance their sense of achievement and learning motivation, and improve their learning efficiency (Du, 2014).

1.2 Enhancement of Interest in Learning Resulting from Active Teaching Atmosphere

The form and content of traditional English classroom teaching are often monotonous, which tends to make students feel bored and reduce their enthusiasm for learning. The micro-lecture, in a more rich and diverse form, reasonably integrates multimedia means such as pictures, videos, and music into the teaching episodes, and constructs the transmission of information through the trinity of vision, hearing, and feeling. While helping students better receive and digest relevant knowledge points, this multimodal feature of micro-lecture allows the learning process to be more interesting, activates the classroom atmosphere, and improves students' enthusiasm for learning and classroom participation (Du, 2014; Liu, 2019).

1.3 Flexible Regulation of Learning Time

The current popularity of the internet and mobile devices has allowed the micro-lecture to remedy the limitations of traditional English classroom teaching. Watching micro-lectures is not limited by place of learning in that students can not only complete watching the micro-lecture videos online or download videos to personal mobile devices, allowing them to learn micro-lecture content at any time. In the learning process, if students find that they do not fully understand some of the points in the video, they can replay the video multiple times and watch the relevant clips repeatedly (Li & Zhao, 2015). When applying micro-lectures in the classroom, teachers can also flexibly adjust the playback of micro-lectures according to students' performance. For the parts that students feel are more difficult to understand, the teacher can appropriately slow the playback rate and timely supplement explanations where necessary (Du, 2014).

1.4 Emphasis on Students' Autonomous Learning

To begin with, teachers assign micro-lecture learning tasks to students before and after class, which requires students to consult materials independently to learn relevant knowledge, and, in turn, exercise students' ability to solve problems and learn independently. Secondly, in the process of applying micro-lecture teaching, teachers play a more important role in leading students' learning and providing scaffolding, while students need to participate more actively in classroom learning and discussion according to their understanding of the content of micro-lecture videos and the questions raised in the videos. Therefore, the dominant position of students is more prominent (Du, 2014).

2. The Application of Micro-lecture Based on the POA

An effective blended teaching and learning environment necessitates the implementation of a sound methodological framework (Neumeier, 2005). The POA is a foreign language teaching approach theory with Chinese characteristics constructed by Professor Qiufang Wen (Wen, 2015). After years of development and improvement, the theoretical system of this approach has always been closely integrated with college English teaching practice and can be quickly and directly applied to practical teaching (Yang, 2015). Many researchers in China have also used the POA as the theoretical framework to construct the blended teaching and learning model of college English (Li, Jia, & Jiang, 2022).

By presenting the communicative scene at the beginning of the teaching unit, the motivating stage of the POA enables students to realize their inadequate language competence in the process of communicative practice, thereby enhancing their desire and motivation for learning and, at the same time, clarifying the unit teaching objectives and output tasks. Professor Wen Qiufang pointed out that given the current popularity of mobile technology, the motivating stage can be filmed as a video or micro-lecture so that students can learn before class (Wen, 2015). In addition, researchers suggest that teachers should apply micro-lectures to the enabling stage and the assessing stage of the POA in the teaching process

(Yang, 2015). Although other researchers have not directly linked the application of micro-lectures to the various stages of the POA, they have pointed out that micro-lectures can promote students' effective learning in college English teaching in terms of pre-class preparation, classroom teaching, and after-class review.

Therefore, there is a considerable theoretical and practical basis for applying micro-lectures to the three stages of the POA. The following will be devoted to the discussion of the teaching design based on an oral English course for English majors at the college where the author teaches.

3. The Application of Micro-lecture in Each Stage of the POA in the Blended Teaching and Learning Environment

Foundation Oral English One is a foundational core course for the first-year English majors at the college where the author teaches. Driven by the concept of digital empowerment and innovative education, the English major of this college has been actively developing a blended teaching and learning mode in recent years. While actively building the online teaching platform resources, the teachers of the course Foundation Oral English One also gradually integrate the micro-lecture into the oral teaching process, making full use of a teaching mode that integrates the online with offline resources, realizing the extension of classroom teaching before and after class, facilitating the construction of motivating stage, enabling stage, and assessing stage of the POA, and allowing teachers' leading role and scaffolding to come into full play.

The following will take a teaching unit taken out of the course Foundation Oral English One as an example to discuss the design and application of micro-lecture in the motivating stage, enabling stage, and assessing stage of the POA, in the blended teaching and learning environment. The teaching material is Unit 10: Life is Pleasure with Friendship to Treasure, taken from the textbook *College Critical Thinking English Course - Speaking Critically - Book One* which is published by Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press.

3.1 The Application of Micro-lecture in the Motivating Stage

The motivating stage of the POA includes three teaching steps: (1) the teacher presents communicative scenes close to real-life situations and topics with cognitive challenges; (2) students try to complete communicative tasks and realize their inadequate language competence so as to inspire their learning motivation. (3) The teacher explains to the students the communicative and linguistic learning goals of classroom teaching, as well as the types and contents of the output tasks (Wen, 2015; Wen, 2018). Based on these three steps, the author designed the micro-lecture in the motivating stage and related blended teaching procedures.

Before class, the teacher will upload the micro-lecture video of the motivating stage onto the online learning platform. In the video, the teacher will, with the help of graphics, present the communication scene and topic by saying the following sentences: 'Friendship is a vital part of our life. Imagine that someone is asking for advice regarding the qualities of a good friendship and the ways to maintain a friendship. What advice would you give and why?'. The scene and topic are adapted from the starting point section of Unit 10. After the scene and the topic are presented, the left half of the micro-lecture screen will play a video clip in which a student is interviewed on the campus of the college. This student's answers are based on the topics just presented in the micro-lecture. This design helps to create a relaxed atmosphere close to real-life situations with which students are familiar. After the student's answer clip is played, the teacher will ask questions in the micro-lecture: 'Do you agree with him? If you were the one interviewed in the clip, what would you say?'. The teacher will then require students to complete the output task of the motivating stage on the online platform by saying: 'Please deliver your response on our learning platform'. The content of the micro-lecture of the motivating stage ends here. The online platform will record whether students have watched the micro-lecture, the number of times they have watched the micro-lecture, and the total length of time for which they have watched the micro-lecture. Students will then complete the output task of the motivating stage online according to the requirements, and the platform will provide an immediate evaluation.

At the beginning of classroom teaching, teachers will once again choose some students to deliver their performance of the output task of the motivating stage in class and comment on students' output. The output task of the motivating stage can pave the way for classroom teaching that comes afterward, and because of its certain cognitive challenge, it can also make students aware of their inadequate language competence, generate their learning desire, and inspire their motivation to learn the input materials. The teacher will then explain the learning objectives as well as the types and contents of the output tasks.

3.2 The Application of Micro-lecture in the Enabling Stage

The enabling stage of the POA includes three teaching steps: (1) the teacher describes the output task; (2) Under the

guidance of the teacher, students choose, from the input material, the content, language form, and discourse structure required for the output task; (3) Students complete the output task under the guidance of the teacher who will check their performances immediately (Wen, 2015; Wen, 2018). Based on these three steps, the author designed the micro-lecture of the enabling stage and related blended teaching procedures.

After the students have learned the content of Dialogue 1 of Unit 10, the teacher will describe, in class, the output task composed of comprehension questions derived from the content of Dialogue 1 listening passage: ‘Do you prefer the Chinese or the Western approach to friendship? How would you make friends with people from different cultures?’ The teacher will then guide the students to realize that the underlying core question key to the completion of the output task is ‘How do we maintain a friendship?’, and also guide them to consider the question ‘What qualities are necessary to maintain a friendship?’ by referring to their answers to the output task of the motivating stage.

The teacher then plays the micro-lecture video of the motivating stage in the classroom. The video begins with a short clip of a story in traditional Chinese culture—Ji Zha’s Sword Hanging, in which Ji Zha hung his sword above the tomb of his deceased friend as he had promised when the friend was alive. The teacher, then, in the micro-lecture, provides students with language and logic scaffolding necessary for the completion of the output task. First, the teacher provides English words and phrases related to the content of the short clip and guides the students to explain, in their own words, relevant ideas such as ‘fidelity in friendship’ proposed by the ancient Chinese. Secondly, in order to deepen students’ critical understanding of ‘fidelity in friendship’, the teacher, by resorting to graphics in the micro lecture, helps them understand that the story of Ji Zha’s Sword Hanging is a positive interpretation of the concept of ‘fidelity in friendship’; on the contrary, a lack of fidelity will negatively affect the maintenance of friendship. In this way, students can understand the profound wisdom of ‘fidelity in friendship’ in Chinese traditional culture from both positive and negative aspects, and further prepare for the output task. The teacher then, in the micro-lecture, guides students to think about whether Western culture also pays attention to the virtues of ‘fidelity in friendship’, and guides them to consider the concept of the friendship of both Chinese and Western culture, with an attitude of searching for common ground while reserving difference. The micro-lecture of the motivating stage ends here. The online platform will record whether students have watched the micro-lecture, the number of times they have watched the micro-lecture, and the total length of time for which they have watched the micro-lecture.

This micro-lecture not only provides students with language and logic scaffolding, but also decomposes the output task into multiple sub-tasks, and reasonably matches the difficulty level of the output task with the students’ language competence. In addition, students can log onto the online learning platform through devices in the classroom, watch the micro-lecture content repeatedly, select the required corpus or viewpoints from the micro-lecture while completing the sub-tasks in turn, and finally complete the output task.

After the micro-lecture is played, students discuss, prepare for, and complete the output in their respective groups with the help of the teacher’s guidance and scaffolding. The teacher then conducts immediate evaluations to help students find inadequacies in their performances and promote effective learning.

3.3 The Application of Micro-lecture in the Assessing Stage

The assessing stage of the POA includes immediate assessment and delayed assessment (Wen, 2015; Wen, 2018). The immediate assessment has been completed in the enabling stage. The delayed assessment, which is the assessment of students’ review output, examines students’ after-class performance in their second time completion of the output task of the enabling stage. The review output and delayed assessment are carried out on the online learning platform. Here, the author mainly discusses the design and application of micro-lecture and related teaching procedures in the delayed assessment.

After class, students will log onto the online learning platform to watch the micro-lectures of the assessment stage uploaded by the teacher. In the video, the teacher, by resorting to graphics, explains the assessment criteria to students from three dimensions: (1) delivery, including clarity and fluency of the answer, as well as accuracy of voice and intonation; (2) language use, including the effective use of grammar and words, as well as the use of basic and complex sentence patterns; (3) topic development, including the overall development and coherence of the answer, as well as the cohesion between the views. Each dimension is divided into 4 grades, with the highest being 4 points and the lowest being 1 point. The sum of the scores of the three dimensions is the final score of the answer. The teacher, then, in the micro-lecture, plays the audio of the two students’ answers, and the text of the answers is displayed synchronously in the micro-lecture. By making annotations in the answer text according to the answer audio, the teacher, in the micro-lecture, explains to the students the performance of the two answers with respect to each dimension of the scoring rubrics and finally calculates the scores. After completing the scoring of the two answers in the micro-lecture, the teacher asks the students to complete the review output task on the learning platform and to complete mutual assessment with reference to the teacher’s

assessment process in the micro-lecture. The assessment of the micro-lecture ends here. The online platform will record whether students have watched the micro-lecture, the number of times they have watched the micro-lecture, and the total length of time for which they have watched the micro-lecture.

This part of the micro-lecture contributes greatly to the teacher's scaffolding in the blended oral English teaching and learning environment. With the help of the teacher's scaffolding, students can better complete the review output and more effectively conduct online teacher-student collaborative assessments. At this point, the application of micro-lectures allows the formative assessment realized through various means in and after classes to form a joint force so as to promote effective learning.

4. Teaching Reflection

The above teaching design reflects that the application of micro-lecture can help to achieve: the construction of motivating, enabling, and assessing stages of the POA; the intimate combination of input learning and productive use; the cooperation between teachers and students in the process of learning, interaction and assessment in the blended teaching and learning environment in and out of classroom; the enhancement of learning and teaching by assessment as well as the organic integration of assessment and teaching process; the teacher's leading role and scaffolding throughout the whole teaching process; the extension of classroom teaching before and after class. Thus, it can be seen that the combination of micro-lecture and the POA in blended oral English teaching and learning environments at the college level can be promising. However, it is undeniable that this combination also brings great challenges to oral English teaching at the college level.

First of all, whether it be a blended teaching and learning mode based on micro-lectures or a teaching and learning process based on the POA, it puts forward higher requirements for students' learning ability. Whether students can effectively internalize the course content is closely related to their learning ability. The improvement of students' learning ability, in turn, can help students develop their language competence and critical thinking ability in the blended teaching and learning environment (Qu, 2019). Therefore, learning ability is considered to be the key ability that should be cultivated in the process of college English teaching (Wen, 2018). Future research can focus on how to effectively help students improve their learning ability in a blended teaching and learning environment based on micro-lectures and the POA.

Secondly, in the blended teaching and learning environment, students' learning is featured with strong autonomy and independence (Myung & Yoo, 2012; Ferreira, Salinas, & Morales, 2014). This might give rise to a lack of external supervision of students' learning especially in the micro-lecture learning before and after class. Although the online learning platform can reflect the length and progress of students' learning, students who lack autonomy and self-control are still susceptible to external factors, and learning efficiency is also affected (Zhao, 2018). In this regard, teachers can formulate more scientific plans and goals for the blended teaching and learning process based on micro-lectures and the POA; scientifically and reasonably combine micro-lectures with online platforms to increase the interest of learning; optimize the guidance and scaffolding at the motivating stage, the enabling stage, and the assessing stage; optimize the supervision and assessment mechanism of each of these three stages. The implementation and effectiveness of these measures can be the focus of future research.

Thirdly, colleges and universities mainly examine students' English proficiency through their class performance and final exams. The results of these examinations cannot objectively and explicitly reflect the effectiveness of micro-lecture learning (Zhao, 2018). Therefore, future research can pay closer attention to whether micro-lectures can truly help students improve their learning effectiveness, and more carefully explore the efficacy of micro-lectures on the improvement of students' language competence and critical thinking ability.

Fourthly, with the gradual popularization of micro-lectures in college English teaching in China, the production technique of micro-lectures is becoming more and more mature. The organic combination of teachers' teaching and graphics can promote students' reception of teaching content. However, in the process of micro-lecture recording, teachers may improperly adjust the teaching discourse of micro-lectures due to the lack of correct discourse consciousness. Research shows that some teachers do not adjust their speed of speech in the micro-lecture according to the language competence of students, and only teach with the speed of speech that they feel most comfortable; some teachers do not consider the needs of students when adjusting the speed of speech, and do not use the appropriate technique to adjust the speed of speech; some teachers overuse simple sentences to record micro-lectures, which may also hinder students' understanding of micro-lectures, and even hinder students' second language acquisition, resulting in the risk of 'fossilization' (Li & Zhao, 2015). Confronted with the above problems, teachers, through future teaching research, should investigate the proper speed of speech in micro-lecture teaching and the proper complexity of teaching discourse compatible with the language competence of the students they teach, scientifically and effectively adjust the micro-lecture teaching discourse, and enhance the effectiveness of micro-lecture teaching.

5. Conclusion

This paper mainly discusses the application of micro-lecture in the motivating, enabling, and assessing stages of the POA in the blended college oral English teaching and learning environment in China. At the same time, it also calls attention to the challenges brought by this teaching design and future research directions. College English teachers should lay stress on the improvement of students' autonomous learning ability, strengthen the supervision of the learning process, optimize the quality of micro-lecture resources, scientifically design the micro-lectures used in the teaching process, and integrate micro-lecture, a product of the Internet and digital age, with the Chinese teaching concept of the POA, so as to cultivate more excellent English talents through college English teaching in the future.

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