

Construction of Self-regulated EFL Micro-course Learning

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Abstract: The article proposes a self-regulated micro-course learning approach which provides different micro-course video clips on the same learning material for the students to choose from in English as a Foreign Language (hereafter referred to as EFL) teaching. We implicitly classify our students in accordance with their English language proficiency levels first and record different videos for them to learn independently before class, students can ask questions or interact with their classmates in an online QQ International (hereafter referred to as QQi) learning community before training their vocational skills in English in a flipped classroom. The innovated research is helpful to narrow the difference in English language proficiency levels, improve learning efficiency and better their comprehensive vocational skills.

Keywords –Self-regulated, EFL learning, micro-course, independent and flexible learning

I. INTRODUCTION

The most influential Micro-course websites in foreign countries are Khan Academy and TED-Ed which present lecturers' instructions, flashes and electronic blackboards with subtitles and introductions. [1] The contents are simple but elaborate for learners of different ages on various subjects. Supporting services include map of knowledge with which learners can review their learning tracks and make study schedule, selecting instructors, consulting the advisors to solve their problems, completing every learning task by doing exercises and tests, interacting with others during the whole learning process. [2]

The most influential Micro-course websites in China are China Micro-course Networks which is designed for middle and primary school students and Micro-course Resources Networks for college students. They mainly present instructors' lecturing with PPT, some are recordings of class-room lectures with introductions and explanations, designed for students in their own institutions. The first supporting resource is display of outstanding teaching recordings which include courseware, teaching plans and comments online, the second service is VOD for students which covers courseware, online tests and online interaction, but each micro-course is independent and irrelevant to other micro-courses.

Most of the micro-courses in China are under construction and developed for competition or research purposes but not for teaching or designed absolutely for the sake of the students. Micro-courses developed from the perspective of the students are rare or even none. [3] We checked micro-courses on National Universities Micro-teaching Competition website and some micro-course videos on the Internet, the first finding is that most of the videos are classroom teaching instruction recordings with PPT or flashes, the second is that as a result of the well-know time range of 5 to 10 minutes, the priority of designing the micro-course is not the teaching requirements but the time limit. Inadequate supporting service and conventional method of presenting can't be overlooked either.

II. SELF-REGULATED EFL MICRO-COURSE LEARNING

2.1 Our Previous studies on Ubiquitous Learning in English Based on Scenarios

Ubiquitous learning provides anyone learning opportunities anytime, anywhere with any device. Initial researches on web-mediated EFL learning started ten years ago when Virtual Policing in English (VPIE) concept came into being, a trainee-centered police service simulation English learning and training program in which participants conceive, develop and manage virtual police organizations to fulfill their duties and services on a global basis utilizing various web-mediated technologies. VPIE was coined by the author as a unique and innovative application of web technologies in scenario-based interpersonal interactions, emphasizing project-based collaborative learning and training to enhance the trainee's vocational skills and career success by experiencing potential working roles with sustained interests. [4] Our research focus shifted to a free and popular online chat tool called QQi several years later, an EFL Learning Community has been set up online via the free messaging tool QQi to consolidate and apply the knowledge learnt in class. One sub-community aims at developing multicultural awareness while the other focuses on expertise training in English for the undergraduates in several universities. Our innovative approach is that the trainees interact with other participants with virtual icons, virtual roles and specific achievement goals according to curriculum-related scenarios. [5] In the year 2013, when another chat software named WeChat was used almost by every smart

phone user, students train their English for Policing on smart phones by acting certain policing roles in or after class, they can change their icons, send photos, words, files or audio recordings to others online, achieving the goal of learning anywhere, anytime. Research on *Ubiquitous Learning in English for Policing Based on Vocational Scenarios* won the Outstanding Teaching Achievement of Liaoning Province in 2014.

2.2 Necessities of self-regulated EFL micro-course learning

At present, micro-course has drawn great attention in education field worldwide, its value in education resources construction for remote areas, professional development for teachers, flexible learning for students, especially for poor students are being explored and studied. Micro-course, an essential learning resource for online learning in the “micro age”, meets the needs of individualized and independent learning as a result of its accessible, short, elaborate, modularized and situational characteristics. Other advantages of micro-course include improving teaching efficiency as well as achieving individualized learning or even offering equal education opportunities for everyone in the world.

Sheng Zhang et al [6] pointed out that the designers should take the following aspects into account: First, learners’ cultural backgrounds like gender, social and economic status, ethnics and nationalities, and their individual differences. Second, the contents of the micro-course like subject and textbook, coherence and continuity, objectives and variety. Third, the application of the micro-course like timing, peer interactions and supporting services. Last, developing technologies like designing and presentation methods.

We focus our attention on the construction of self-regulated micro-course learning based on the following findings:

Articles on micro-course on major academic resources websites like CNKI, Wanfangdata and Duxiu in China, and search engine in English like “bing” are mainly on the definition or concept of micro-course; very few are on the application. The learners’ comments on the contents of micro-course presented by Khan Academy and TED-Ed indicate that different learners react quietly differently to the same micro-course, the course commented as “easy” may be “quite difficult” in others’ eyes, this is much the same as what we find in our EFL teaching process due to the fact that a student is accepted to a university based on his or her total score in national college entrance exam but not the score of the English exam, the different English proficiency levels in the same class makes it a tough mission for the teacher to meet requests from every student. Micro-course can be parts of the solution to the problem in that it allows every learner to study the course any time, but it can’t meet the individual needs in the real sense unless different contents on the same subject or text are also available for anyone anytime, anywhere on any device.

Searching results of “layered micro-course” on CNKI are three articles on middle school information class and English teaching theories. As far as we know, there is no research on self-regulated micro-course learning home and abroad at present, but only through accessing different levels of micro-course learning material, can the learners take the maximum advantages of being accessible, time-saving, elaborate and understandable of the micro-course teaching, and display their full potentials in their professional field at present and in the future.

2.3 Construction and application of self-regulated EFL micro-course learning

Based on our previous research achievements and guided by the *College English Curriculum Teaching Requirements* of the Ministry of Education, this research provides different micro-course videos on the same text to achieve self-regulated EFL learning and interactions among teachers and learners in a learning community through QQ to integrate micro-course into a flipped classroom and consolidate, reflect, apply and innovate the knowledge, to realize individual development and vocational targeted training for the students through implicitly layered English flipped classroom teaching and simulated training.

The goal of the micro-course learning method is to provide self-regulated learning for the students before class, equipping them with relative knowledge so as to apply it in a brand-new teaching method called flipped classroom, which reverses the traditional model as shown in Fig. 1: [7]

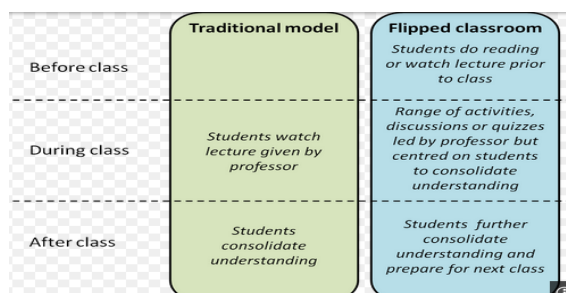


Fig. 1 Traditional model vs. Flipped classroom

We take Unit 4 *A Virtual Life* of college English course as research project to present different micro-course video for the students before class. Teachers of the research team called implicitly layered teaching first classify the students in the research classes into five different groups based on their English scores in the National Entrance Exam, a quiz on vocabularies and translation, a spoken English test exam scores, marking each group as A, B, C, D and E to remind the teachers to teach accordingly without telling the students. The advantages of the implicitly layered teaching is that the teachers may assign different tasks for different students to improve his/her skills based on his/her English language proficiency without tagging each student his/her English competence. The researchers also decide the possible knowledge for students in each group to acquire before class so as to follow the teacher's instruction in class days later, we present five categories of micro-course video for the text *A Virtual Life* and mark each video with A, B, C, D and E to indicate different levels of difficulty as shown in Table 1:

Micro-course video tag (A representing the most difficult, E representing the easiest)	Contents
A	The Construction and Implementation of Scenarios
B	On the Internet
C	Structure of Unit 4
D	Grammar and Expression of Unit 4
E	Key Words of Unit 4

Table 1: Self-regulated micro-course learning videos

Each video contains recordings of the teacher's instructions, PPT or flashes, video or audio clips to arouse learning interests and improve learning efficiency. This innovated approach allows a student to select one or more suitable video clips to watch in accordance with their English competences or time available, if they have any doubts about the contents of these videos, they can go to the QQi learning community to ask the teachers or interact with other students to get ready for the classroom learning, for the classroom learning is no longer mainly on vocabulary explanation or paraphrasing but text understanding, consolidation, even application of the learnt knowledge like simulated training based on scenarios.

A tertiary quantitative and process-oriented assessment system is introduced to evaluate the learning process and results. The system is quite different from the commonly used score-oriented assessment which utilizing only the score of a single test as the final results for a learner's performance in the past semester. Tertiary quantitative focuses more on the exact performance online, in other words, mark every specific learning with scores while process-oriented is to focus more on the learning process, in other words, to encourage every student to strive for a better self rather than always compared with others or judged by only one exam. The combination of these two systems ensures a concrete and reasonable assessment under the circumstances of web-mediated learning.

III. CONCLUSION

EFL is only a part of the basic courses in college, reflecting the similarities that each student's total score of the six subjects in the national entrance exam is much the same while competence in each subject, in most cases, quite different from others', making it hard for the teachers to meet individual needs in classroom teaching, this study is helpful in solving this problem. For one thing, it can make full use of the available courseware and web technologies to connect students and teachers, train the students to better their vocational skills in English after class, for another, it can help the students learn flexibly and independently.

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