

## Use Micro-Lectures to Increase Self-Efficacy in English Listening

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### Abstract

Listening is a bottleneck in English learning and plays a crucial role in improving the overall level of English; however, listening is often considered the most difficult skill for English learners to master. Inability to understand and communicate with others will reduce learners' self-efficacy. Online micro-lectures are short, flexible, rich in content, and highly targeted, and are specifically suitable for mobile learning. The use of micro-lectures to improve the self-efficacy of English learners can boost their confidence and motivation and thus enhance their listening skills.

**Key words:** Listening skills; Micro-lectures; Self-efficacy

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### INTRODUCTION

Listening is an important skill in English learning. Improved listening comprehension can promote

other language skills. However, the development of listening skills has not received the attention it deserves, which has resulted in a weak listening foundation for students in general. As a result, students' self-efficacy in listening learning is low. Self-efficacy refers to a person's subjective judgment as to whether he or she can successfully perform certain achievement. There are two main factors that influence the formation of self-efficacy: one is the experience of individual success or failure, and the other is the individual's attribution method. Self-efficacy can be improved through training. This concept was first proposed by Albert Bandura. In the 1980s, the theory of self-efficacy was enriched and developed, and it was also supported by a large number of empirical studies. Chen Yaxuan (2007) and other researchers, who study on the correlation between non-English majors' autonomous learning performance and learners' self-efficacy in online environment, show that students with high self-efficacy have significant improvement in autonomous learning performance in network environment, while students with low self-efficacy is not obvious (Chen & Chen, 2007). The reason is that students with low self-efficacy have insufficient self-confidence and weak self-control ability in learning. Constructing an environment conducive to personalized learning through micro-lectures can enable students with a weak foundation in English to gain a sense of accomplishment in learning, find self-confidence, improve self-efficacy and thus promote the listening level of English learners.

### 1. DEFINITION OF MICRO-LECTURES

The interpretation of micro in Modern Chinese Dictionary includes small, terse and profound and subtle. These are exactly the characteristics of micro-lectures. The short form of micro-learning is conducive to fragmented learning in modern society. Because of its shortness, the content must be refined and the design must be smart.

The 60-second course, proposed by Professor LeRoy A. McGrew of University of Northern Iowa in the United States, can be said to be the earliest prototype of the micro-lecture. Professor McGrew proposed that the 60-second course should be designed to popularize common knowledge of organic chemistry among non-chemistry students and the general public. He designed the 60-second course into three parts: introduction of concepts, explanations and examples of combining life, and thought that experts in other fields could popularize their majors in a similar way. The concept of micro-lecture was first proposed in 2008 by David Penrose, a senior teaching designer at San Juan College in New Mexico (Shieh, 2009). He proposed five steps for micro-learning design: 1. List the main concepts covered in the usual 60-minute course, which form the core content of the micro-lecture. 2. Write an introduction and conclusion of 15 to 30 seconds to provide the background for the main concepts. 3. Record the above with the microphone and webcam. The content is about 60 seconds to 3 minutes. 4. Design follow-up assignments for micro-lectures and guide students to further explore key concepts through reading and other activities. 5. Use written assignments to enable students to master what they have learned. Combining the characteristics of English learning, micro-lectures can be defined as lessons of less than 20 minutes in length, with self-contained content that is convenient for online and mobile learning.

## 2. ADVANTAGES OF USING MICRO-LECTURES IN ENGLISH LISTENING TEACHING

According to the linguist Krashen's Affective Filtering hypothesis, the learner's emotional factors affect the occurrence of language acquisition. These factors such as motivation, self-confidence and anxiety play a role in filtering language input. Inadequate learning motivation, low self-confidence and excessive anxiety can hinder the input of language materials. Micro-lectures can play a positive role in enhancing learners' motivation, improving self-confidence and reducing anxiety. First of all, the openness of micro-lecture construction makes its content very rich and time-effective, making it easy for learners to find their favorite learning content. The multiple structure of micro-lectures makes it easier for learners to find a learning style that suits them, thereby increasing their self-confidence. The privacy of micro-learning prevents learners from having the anxiety and embarrassment of being unable to answer questions in class. The real-time feedback of the practice enables learners to learn under lower psychological stress.

In the form of micro-lectures, it is flexible to use short videos for teaching. Practice has proved that the use of

short videos can promote the teaching of English listening. Studies by Zhou Guanglei et al (2004) show that video-assisted instruction helps to improve students' listening skills, and videos are especially helpful for learners with low language skills. Because videos can provide non-verbal information such as scenes, characters, gestures, posture, facial expressions, etc., which undoubtedly promotes viewers' understanding of what is happening. When realizing that they understand the message conveyed by the videos, learners will undoubtedly enhance their self-confidence and sense of self-efficacy. The increase in self-efficacy, in turn, prompts them to invest more time in watching videos, which will form a virtuous circle.

Micro-lectures are also convenient for special strategy training. Listening strategies include metacognitive strategies, cognitive strategies, and social / affective strategies. (O'Malley and Chamot, 1989). Metacognitive strategies are the planning, monitoring and evaluation of listening processes. Cognitive strategies refer to solving problems by considering how to store and retrieve information, such as focusing on keywords, using non-verbal information, making inferences and taking notes. Social / affective strategies include asking the other party to clarify the problem and talking to language learners themselves to reduce stress or anxiety. For example, predictive training before reading or listening exercises. Research shows that strategy training can not only improve students' listening performance, but also help students master how to read and listen effectively and have a sense of control over the reading or listening process. O'Malley et al. found in their research that learners with better listening skills pay more attention to larger units of speech during the listening process, and only pay attention to individual vocabulary when they encounter hearing difficulties. That is to say, just as a skilled reader's field of vision includes the entire meaning group instead of a single word or character when reading, a good listener pays more attention to the meaning group in the whole listening process. Thus, in the micro-lectures focusing on listening strategy training, teachers can improve learners' understanding by teaching them how to identify meaning groups and how to accumulate chunks of words.

Guo Dandan's empirical research shows that students are in favor of teachers' training and guidance on learning methods to improve listening strategies (Guo, 2013). Listening strategies approved by students include predicting, generalization after listening, listening to the original text while looking at the tape scripts, and learning the original vocabulary and expressions after listening. Many studies on learning strategies have also shown that training in learning strategies can improve teaching effectiveness and students' learning efficiency as well. The study also shows that the most popular learning materials for students are stories, dialogues and movies.

All three types of materials can be good materials for making micro-lectures. As for stories, the background knowledge and the cultural connotation behind the stories can be introduced through micro-lectures. Micro-lectures can also be used to design a variety of related exercises for a situational dialogue. As for movies, a variety of micro-lectures can be produced to improve oral expressions, such as background introduction, appreciation of fragments, and appreciation of dialogues, voice-over exercises and role-playing.

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### **3. MICRO-LECTURES HAS CHANGED THE TRADITIONAL TEACHING MODE**

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Foreign language teaching in the micro-learning environment has changed the previous teacher-centered teaching mode, which has been gradually replaced by teacher-led teaching and student-oriented teaching and learning modes. Students have greater autonomy in the content of micro-learning. Learning progress is also up to the students. For those who do not understand, they can master it through repeated learning, so that they can learn step by step, it is easy to obtain a sense of accomplishment and enhance their self-confidence in learning simultaneously. When students encounter difficulties that they cannot solve, they can resort to teachers and classmates for help through real-time or non-real-time communication.

The emergence of micro-lectures has changed the single mode of traditional teaching methods, and they are not limited by time and place or the number of students. Students do not have the stress and anxiety of answering questions in class. At the same time, micro-learning is conducive to achieving multi-modality of the input mode. The multi-modality of the input mode adapts to the different learning styles of the learners, making it easier for learners to find an input mode suitable for their own learning styles, which is conducive to the cultivation of interest and the establishment of self-confidence. The rapid advancement of network technology and the increasing popularity of computers have made it easy to obtain authentic English information, therefore, the update of micro-lecture content will be guaranteed.

Micro-lectures are conducive to the formation of a content-centered teaching mode. Penny Ur suggested that teachers should focus on providing students with practical content-centered training activities, not just language forms (Penny Ur, 1984). With content as the center, students can expand their knowledge and improve their language skills, reflecting the basic function of language as a communication tool and information transmission medium. Content centrality can also easily stimulate students' interest in learning. Human beings are born with curiosity and desire to explore this world; however, different people may have different points of interest.

Generally speaking, every one has their own favorite content. Micro lectures are just like the atoms that make up the entire knowledge network. Atoms can be combined together to form molecules. Molecules can be formed into everything in different ways. Teachers can aggregate multiple related micro-lectures into a learning package of topic modules. Students can choose the learning packages to study according to their own needs, and improve their language skills while expanding their knowledge in general.

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### **4. WEB-BASED LISTENING TEACHING IS MORE TARGETED**

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Huang Rui's survey on whether college students are willing to use the Internet to learn listening shows that most students (78.7%) are more willing to use the Internet to learn listening. The vast majority of students (91.3%) believe that using the Internet for learning not only improves their listening skills, but also improves their other language skills. 38.6% of the students want teachers to recommend online resources (Huang, 2009). Surveys have shown that students spend much more time searching for materials than they use online learning. This shows that on the one hand, students like the network-based learning method, and on the other hand, they will be a little lost and puzzled about the vast ocean of information, which requires the appropriate guidance of teachers so that they can effectively use network resources. The advent of micro-lectures can meet this need. Organizing and aggregating a large number of English learning materials on the Internet, and making a micro-lecture collection with topics as clues, can thus meet the needs of targeted English learning.

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### **5. WAYS TO IMPROVE SELF-EFFICACY IN LISTENING LEARNING THROUGH MICRO-LECTURES**

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There are many reasons for the low self-efficacy of students in foreign language learning. When one ordinary student starts to learn English, he or she does not lay a good foundation due to the following factors: for instance, the pronunciation of the teacher is inaccurate, and the influence of the pronunciation of the dialect causes the students' pronunciation to be inaccurate. Inaccurate pronunciation also results in hearing difficulties. Language learning is different from other courses. If students only learn foreign languages in class, it is definitely not enough. Without a lot of supplementary reading after class, the vocabulary will not increase. As a consequence, the limited vocabulary will affect listening and reading comprehension. There are also traditional methods of teaching grammar that are often tedious and

difficult to stimulate students' interest in learning. Weak grammar is also a major obstacle to listening and reading comprehension. The traditional teaching for one period is generally composed of 45 minutes. For students with a poor foundation, reading for a long time or listening to English materials with high concentration of energy is prone to fatigue, which in turn produces negative psychological suppression and affects the learning effect. Micro-lectures, because of their shortness, will end very quickly before students become fatigued. Students can change their learning content or learning styles to give the brain a positive rest and improve learning efficiency. The tedious, monotonous classroom approach is one of the main reasons for the low interest in learning. The modularized course structure of micro-lectures makes it possible for diverse teaching and learning activities. Prior to the listening activity, teachers can ask students to discuss the topics they will hear and activate their original relevant cognitive schemas. After listening, the relevant activities such as sentence-by-sentence reading, reading aloud, repeating, discussing and debating can be carried out. If the learners are using a movie clip, they can also perform voice-over exercises and role-playing activities. In short, a variety of teaching and learning activities can increase the interest of learning and avoid the fatigue that is easily generated by a single teaching or learning method.

Su Dingfang and Zhuang Zhixiang summarized the factors that affect listening as: the characteristics of listening materials, speakers, tasks, learners and process (Shu & Zhuang, 1996). The characteristics of listening materials refer to factors such as the speed of speech, vocabulary and syntax, and the familiarity of the learner with the content involved. Teachers can develop micro-lectures with different speaking speeds, different vocabulary, and syntactic difficulties to meet the needs of learners at different levels. It also increases the familiarity of learners with learning materials by means of pre-explanation of new words and introduction of background knowledge. The characteristics of speakers are mainly gender differences and different accents. English is an international language. Students may deal with people from different countries after graduation, which requires them to understand English spoken by people with different accents. It is necessary for teachers to record the same listening material for people with accents in different countries, so that students will have the opportunity to distinguish and become familiar with English of various accents. Task characteristics are the purpose of listening comprehension and the types of problems involved in listening learning. For the same learning materials, teachers can design learning tasks with different difficulties for students at different levels of English, so that it is possible for all types of students to expand their knowledge and achieve a sense of

achievement. The characteristics of process mainly refer to the psychological process of listening comprehension. Unfamiliar with the learning materials and lack of relevant background knowledge, learners often rely more on the "bottom-up" understanding mode. That is to say, from the perception of sounds to the recognition of words, from words to sentences, and then from sentences to texts. However, learners who speak English as their mother tongue or have a good command of English will usually combine the "top-down" cognitive model to achieve higher reading or listening efficiency. The "top-down" model uses existing knowledge, experience and overall expectations and background knowledge to analyze and process the received information. If teachers provide the relevant background knowledge through micro-lectures, and provide relevant vocabulary explanations and exercises before listening, it will help students to combine the "top-down" cognitive model and improve listening efficiency.

Linguists Stempleski and Tomalin once said that the teaching method of audio-visual combination is more comprehensive and truthful than any other teaching media. It can stimulate the right hemisphere of the brain that controls image thinking and the left hemisphere of abstract brain, function well and participate in activities to absorb knowledge (Ju, 2007). Web-based micro-lectures are easy to use video editing and production software to make micro-learning content by using a large number of ready-made video resources on the Internet. In this way, it is possible to create a near-authentic context for the learner to the greatest extent. Foreign language learning and application cannot be separated from context. Creating an authentic or near-authentic context is conducive to language acquisition. The creation of context can be achieved in a variety of ways. Teachers can provide pictures of real objects and scenes, use movie clips, use graphics, and use cartoon animations to interpret scene dialogues. They can achieve this multi-channel and multi-modal display through micro-lectures. Using movie and video editing, teachers can also build English micro-lectures for watching movies. Because movies have a storyline and their content is close to life, it is easy to stimulate students' learning interest. Students can learn authentic foreign language expressions through watching movies. Movies can create a near-authentic language learning environment. Film editing can be used to design a variety of language teaching and learning activities. For example, students can guess what the characters in the movies are saying by playing only the videos without the sound. What's more, students can play a role in the movies to stimulate their imagination and creativity, and thus activate the classroom atmosphere. Students can be asked to think about watching videos with the sound later. They will pay more attention to the expressions used by the characters in the movies. This prevents

them from being exclusively interested in the plot of the movies and ignores language learning. Movie teaching is suitable for beginners to advanced English learners, but the design of the practice is different. The nature of learning tasks is different. For English learners who are at an advanced level, word filling exercises will be designed. For example, remove some of the words or phrases that students need to master on a given script, and ask students to fill in the blanks after watching the movies. For blanks where cultural differences are involved, teachers can pause the movies and give relevant explanations. Furthermore, teachers need to explain the regular patterns of sound changes that occur during a normal speech, such as linking, stress, reduction, etc., and repeatedly play recordings, and let students imitate after reading. For the philosophical words and expressions appearing in a classic dialogue, students can also be grouped to discuss.

In the traditional listening classroom teaching, the control of audio playback is entirely in the hands of the teacher. The teacher decides what to play, when to pause, when to repeat, and how many times to repeat. Students also have no control over the speed of the material they are listening to. With the micro-learning method, students can decide what to play, when to pause and when to listen again. It has great flexibility. Students can master the progress and the number of times they listen, which can reduce their frustration. Teachers can all transfer the knowledge through micro-learning so that students can learn and master it independently. Then, during the classroom teaching time, teachers can design a variety of language communication activities, such as situational dialogues, theater performances, speeches, debates, pictures and so on. In this way, the classroom teaching will have a lively atmosphere and avoid a tedious classroom atmosphere.

The development of listening micro skills can improve students' listening comprehension. Micro-learning is an effective means to cultivate students' micro-skills, such as the development of predictive ability. The predictive ability is a micro-skill that people often use in their daily communication. Learners can infer what the other party might say and the topics involved according to the specific context. Before the listening task begins, introducing relevant background, designing related questions, activating the cognitive schemas and background knowledge which is already in the students' heads, and requesting students to predict what to listen to will undoubtedly improve students' understanding. Guessing words is also an important listening micro-skill. Students may hold the wrong belief that they must understand every single word when practicing listening, which will hurt their self-confidence and reduce their self-efficacy

in learning. It is necessary for students to understand that it is normal for them not to understand every individual word, so that they can master the micro skills of guessing words. Topics, contexts, syntactic structures, background knowledge, etc. involved in listening materials can be used to guess words. All these can be introduced through micro-lectures.

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## CONCLUSION

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In short, the openness, quick updating, modularity, and diversity of presentation methods of micro-lectures are conducive to improving the listening level of English learners, especially for adult students who have difficulty in spending plenty of time studying, using mobile learning devices, such as mobile phones and tablet computers to learn micro-learning content that suits their level, will improve the self-efficacy of English listening learning. Improving self-efficacy of learners will increase learning motivation, make them invest more time in listening exercises willingly and further promote the development of their listening skills.

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