

Research on the Teaching Reform of *Business English Listening and Speaking* Based on the Blackboard Platform from OBE Perspective

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Abstract: The “One Belt, One Road” initiative places greater demands on cultivating business English talents. Composite talents who can communicate effectively in business are in high demand. Based on the OBE teaching concept, the course is reversely designed with the help of the Blackboard platform and other information tools. Teachers integrate the requirements of professional standardized examinations into the course teaching and evaluate the results of learners’ output in a diversified formative manner.

Keywords: The Blackboard Platform, Business English, OBE

1. Introduction

Talents with a global perspective, able to participate in international affairs, and capable of participating in international competitions are in high demand for the advancement of “One Belt, One Road.” As an application-oriented university, the training direction of undergraduate education should be based on the concept of “pre-employment vocational education,” which aims to cultivate application-oriented, high-quality compound talents for local services. Business English specialists have become necessary application-oriented talents in the “One Belt, One Road” boom due to their expertise in language, economics, and trade. The essential prerequisites for talent training are their language, knowledge, and practical communication abilities.

This study introduces the OBE teaching concept based on a clearer understanding of applied talents’ connotation and level. It uses the Blackboard platform to carry out the teaching reform of the course “*Business English Listening and Speaking*.” Teachers of this course further optimize the syllabus, enrich the teaching contents, refine the teaching points following the National Business English Teaching Standards, adopt the Blackboard platform, Rain Classroom, and other modern educational technologies to carry out diversified course teaching. They also optimize the evaluation system into the formative evaluation and align the teaching contents and assessment forms with the international and domestic business English standardized examinations, such as BEC, BTEM.

2. OBE

OBE (Outcome Based Education) educational philosophy is also called outcome-oriented education, which is an educational philosophy based on learning outcomes or result-oriented. Spady (1981) first put forward the term “outcome-based education,” whose four principles are “clarity of focus,” “expanded opportunities,” “high expectations,” and “designing back.”^[1] This concept focuses on outcomes and emphasizes the educational process, as opposed to the input-based idea.^[2] The graduation goals and the curriculum goals should reflect society’s specific needs for talents and students’ ultimate expectations for learning from the macro and micro levels. Therefore, systematic curriculum settings and courses should be carried out in course design, teaching methods, evaluation methods, etc. Since then, Harden (1999), inspired by Spady, argued that OBE “is a performance-based approach at the forefront of curriculum development, leading the way in reforming the way medicine is educated and administered”^[3] and opening up the practice of talent development in the medical field. Scholars have carried out OBE teaching practice in different areas based on initial ideas and principles. The research perspective has experienced the expansion of education and teaching concepts limited to

the macro level of talent training to the micro-level of curriculum theory. ^[4]

The concept of OBE was introduced into China from Europe and America. After slow development in the early stage, it is now in its infancy. Since 2016, research results have shown a trend of accelerated development centering on such themes as the introduction of basic concepts and systems ^[5], practical exploration of engineering education ^{[6][7]}, and talent cultivation ^[8]. The author carries out a fuzzy search on CNKI with “OBE” and “Business English” as keywords, and the number of articles published is 81. However, there are few articles on teaching reform achievements of business English courses based on the Blackboard platform. Therefore, the teaching reform of business English courses guided by the OBE concept has specific research value.

3. Reforming Practice

3.1 Designing Back

It is a compulsory course for business English majors which provides essential business English oral practical knowledge and comprehensive application skills of the English language. To accomplish this goal, students must learn specific business English knowledge and skills as well as know how to engage in simple oral communication in foreign-related business activities. They can improve their abilities by attending several training projects, socializing, and cooperating with others. This integrated arrangement will strengthen their comprehensive English ability and lay a solid foundation for them to use English proficiently in real work situations in the future.

3.1.1 Teaching Tasks Are Designed to Achieve Effective Foreign Business Communication

The purpose of this course is to provide students with the basic process of international trade and international business communication, strengthen their general industry knowledge, and develop their communication sensitivity as future business English talents. The particularity of the epidemic poses more challenges to the teaching, and at the same time, gives it more room for progress. Through this course, students will use real-life businesses and products to cultivate practical business communication skills. For example, the 2020 Canton Fair was held online, with exhibitors' basic information and exhibits displayed. Therefore, teachers guided students to choose one Canton Fair exhibitor and several exhibitions from the original self-created companies, brands, and products and trained them in language and pragmatic skills around basic trade processes. Students are divided into groups and play the roles of company managers, marketing and promotion personnel, factory personnel, negotiators, etc. They learn how to use business skills to communicate effectively by mastering basic sentence patterns and basic business background knowledge.

3.1.2 Integrating Domestic and International Standardized Examinations Such as TEM, BTEM, and BEC into the Task Designing

Teachers can reasonably integrate the business-related texts in the listening of TEM4 or TEM 8 with the related topics of this course as practical exercise materials in class or after class. For example, the subject of Dialogue 1 of the original question for TEM 4 Listening in 2017 is product after-sales service telephone communication. The customer's computer has just been bought for a month, and there is a problem of file transfer loss, and he is emotionally anxious: “Well, I was transferring my files to it from my flash drive, and they got lost. Everything!” Teachers can focus on cultivating students' pragmatic ability of business English on how to deal with customers' complaints reasonably and solve problems effectively based on solving multiple-choice questions. “Okay. Now, don't worry. I'm sure we can sort something out.” Here customer service uses an empathic strategy to reassure the customer: “Oh. My goodness.” and “Okay. I can understand how upset you must be.”

TBEM 4 and TBEM 8 are exams for business English majors and have gradually emerged in recent years. The Cambridge Business English Exam (hereinafter referred to as BEC) is one of the many exams that prove the level of professional qualifications and can, to a certain extent, reflect the certificate holder's ability to communicate in English in the workplace environment. While the focus of these two exams may differ, the results of both exams can serve as a reflection of a candidate's mastery of business English and their ability to use it. The topics such as “telephone communication” and “business messaging” in BEC intermediate listening can be appropriately reverse designed to check students' communication abilities.

3.2 Using the Informational Platform

This course reform utilizes Blackboard as a teaching platform.

3.2.1 Setting Tasks

According to the syllabus, teachers could reasonably divide the basic process of international trade into different stages, integrate the themes of each unit in the textbook and announce the staged teaching goals on the Blackboard platform before class. They can also use the system's built-in reminder function to guide students to clarify the learning tasks. The new words and phrases covered in the textbook, especially business-related content, are the default preview content. In addition, the theme-related content (such as text and video resources) of public course resources on various online course platforms can be attached to the BB platform to expand students' horizons.

The class discussion forum is also an effective place to guide students' independent learning and thinking. Teachers can post thought-provoking questions related to the unit's topic in advance to get a sense of the students' current stock of business language knowledge and language skills and can hold off on responding to students' queries. Peer learners can sometimes briefly discuss a topic or question or gain more information through other students' replies by browsing classmates' responses and questions. Teachers should take note of common issues that appear in their students' responses and address them in the classroom during teaching.

3.2.2 Analyzing Tasks

OBE's teaching philosophy stresses the importance of classroom teaching, which includes analyzing final results, dividing tasks, and teaching students how to learn. Taking the theme of "exhibition" in international trade as an example, teachers can subdivide this theme into multi-level themes and present the main content of the unit on the BB platform in advance. The secondary themes may involve "exhibition-related business background introduction," "pre-show preparation," "exhibition," "post-show closing," etc. The topic breakdown can describe the content involved in the "exhibition" theme to students from a macro level so that students can understand the "what to do" in business activities and then learn the specific "how to do."

3.2.3 Implementing Tasks

In addition to classroom audio-visual practice, students are required to perform independent practice and cooperative group work after class. Our department introduces the foreign language 3D training room to help teachers realize virtual scene selection, real-time recording, and vividly show students' group role play with more realistic scene simulation. The video can be copied so that students can easily self-examine the completion of the activity. In addition to the after-school simulation practice, the second classroom competition for learning also has a more apparent practical output. Students participate in various business English practice competitions to fully demonstrate their business English audio-visual skills.

3.3 Diversification of Formative Evaluation of Output

Formative evaluation can better reflect the effect of students' periodic learning than regular exams. First, this course conducts periodic assessments for each topic. In teaching, teachers use Tencent Classroom to record students' active participation in the classroom; and use the BB platform and Rain Classroom interfaces to conduct real-time classroom listening quizzes. Secondly, this course also introduces diversified evaluation methods such as teacher evaluation, personal self-evaluation, and peer review. The BB platform discussion forum is used to display students' business scenario simulation ideas, audio, and video, and motivate students to make adequate evaluations and give specific comments by embedding questionnaire tools or direct postback evaluations. Third, the results of the performance are in various forms. The closed-book examination of students' listening and speaking ability at the end of the term is abandoned. This course encourages students to demonstrate active learning and use their business language skills to complete cross-cultural business communication projects. For example, in the theme "exhibition" mentioned above, students will thoroughly understand the concept of "exhibition" in exploring the business background. The introduction of representative exhibitions at home and abroad and the collection and classification of materials is an evaluable result. Exhibition preparation and personnel arrangement can be discussed through the company group meeting. According to the textbook example, another achievement is students' simulated discussion videos on the actual exhibitors and product exhibition arrangement mentioned above. Filming profiles

of the target company and product, conducting video or interactive marketing activities during the specific exhibition process are also assessable results; similarly, the summary after the exhibition can also be developed to measure students' practical ability.

4. Conclusion

Business English teaching largely relies on traditional English teaching methods, which are incompatible with modern society. It is of great practical significance to introduce the OBE concept in constructing the business English major curriculum and carry out teaching reform using modern education information technology. There is an inevitable transformation of college business English majors into application-oriented majors. The results-oriented approach advocates learning-centered teaching, emphasizes knowledge integration and encourages students to learn cooperatively. It embodies the "unity of knowledge and action," essentially integrating input learning and output application. The teaching reform by introducing the OBE concept can enhance classroom vitality, promote a good classroom teaching ecology, and give full play to the central position of students. The Blackboard platform and other related Internet+ multimedia enhance a diverse learning and group collaboration activities both online and offline. They also help teachers implement multi-modal and various teaching, improving the students' independent learning potential and teamwork skills.

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