

Research on Teaching English Writing in Application-Oriented Higher Education University from the Perspective of Outcome-Based Education—Taking University of Sanya as an Example

Qin Yuan

*Center for Applied Language and Cultural Studies, University of Sanya, Sanya, Hainan, 572022, China
Department of Linguistics, University of Victoria, Victoria, BC V8W 2Y2, Canada
qinyuan@uvic.ca*

Abstract: *In the traditional teaching of English writing in the classroom, teachers are mainly used to impart course knowledge in class, while students are learning passively, and their learning outcomes have not been receiving enough attention. Based on the theory of outcome-based education, this paper explores the reform on teaching English writing in application-oriented higher education universities from the aspects of curriculum objectives, curriculum settings, teaching methods, and course assessment. It aims at developing students' practical writing skills, achieving professional goals, so as to cultivate application-oriented English talents for the construction of Hainan Free Trade Port.*

Keywords: *Outcome-based Education teaching model; application-oriented university; English writing*

1. Introduction

The traditional ways of teaching English writing for English majors in universities focuses on teaching English writing in the classroom, practitioners or teachers still play the leading role in teaching. In the traditional teaching mode, teachers often encourage competitiveness, but actually students do not have many opportunities to cooperate with each other, and thus their personalities and creativity cannot be fully demonstrated and cultivated. Students' learning outcomes are often ignored because teachers' completion of teaching tasks has become the ultimate goal. Therefore, it is highly questionable whether students' learning outcomes can be compatible with their future good jobs. In 2019, Wu Yan, Director of the Higher Education Department of the Ministry of Education, gave a keynote speech on "New Liberal Arts and Diversified Foreign Languages." He proposed new goals and requirements for foreign language talents in the new era, and it is imperative to reform English programs in various universities. As one of the English programs in an application-oriented university in Hainan Province, this program can be reformed based on the "New Humanities," with the goal of cultivating versatile and application-oriented talents. Therefore, traditional classroom teaching is no longer able to promote students' learning motivation, and to some extent, it hinders students' learning effectiveness. Therefore, the teaching of English writing courses urgently needs to be reformed. OBE will be conducive to transforming the traditional single teaching mode into a multi-level teaching mode, optimizing the teaching content of English writing, and thus better enhancing students' English written expression ability, critical thinking ability, and cross-cultural communication ability.

2. The Concept of Outcome-Based Education

Outcome-based education (OBE) emerged in the United States in the 1980s. The reason for its rise is that the US government and the public have put forward requirements on how to improve the quality of education in schools, and have begun to pay attention to issues such as the effectiveness of what students have learned in school and applying the knowledge they have learned. In 1994, American scholar Spady pointed out that the OBE education model is an output-based education model. Compared with the old and traditional education models that emphasize how and what students learn in the classroom, Spady believes that the concept of OBE focuses more on ensuring that students

ultimately succeed in learning what they have learnt from every aspect of teaching.^[1] This means that curriculum design, teaching, and evaluation all need to focus on students' learning outcomes. In addition, Yuan (2023) proposed traditional education follows the principle of designing teaching based on emphasizing the integrity of subject knowledge, while OBE follows the setting of corresponding training goals and graduation requirements based on national and local economic development, employers and students' needs, in order to construct a reasonable curriculum system, further optimizing students' learning process, ensuring that educational goals are consistent with students' learning outcomes, and ultimately improving students' comprehensive literacy.^[2]

The educational philosophy of OBE emphasizes students' learning outcomes and adheres to the student-centered approach. Therefore, in the process of explaining professional knowledge, teachers need to highlight the close relationship between students' academic performance and employment. Specifically, teaching staff should fully understand the types of learning methods and personality characteristics of students, formulate practical training goals, curriculum settings, and evaluation indicators so as to ensure that English majors can better master professional skills, and their learning outcomes can be highly valued and recognized by society.

3. The Current Situation of Teaching English Writing in University of Sanya

Nowadays, many practioners or teachers in different teaching areas have been reforming their teaching strategies so as to build new educational and teaching paradigms that focus on learner-centered instruction and students' learning outcomes (Li, 2008; Liu, 2014; Wu, 2022).^{[3][4][5]} In 2019, our English program was selected as one of the applied programs in universities of Hainan Province. The applied talents cultivated in this program should adapt to the development and needs of the regional economy. Therefore, the courses that students learn should lay a solid foundation for the learning outcomes they will achieve. However, the teaching of English writing in this program still presents a traditional and simple teaching mode: in class, teachers instruct the whole class in the classroom, and explain the relevant knowledge points of English writing courses step by step according to the requirements of the syllabus; after class, teachers mainly communicate with students by revising their compositions. In this way, due to the different cognitive abilities of students, they may have different abilities to absorb what the teachers instructed to them. Thus, many students are unable to digest the key points of knowledge taught by the teachers at the same time, and not mention about enhancing their critical thinking ability. To put it plainly, teachers are in a dominant position and students only learn writing skills passively. Teachers often fail to solve various problems that arise in English writing for each student due to limited time and energy, and therefore, students may have fewer opportunities to be trained in a critical way of writing English, they may gradually have anxiety about English writing. From the aforementioned, the traditional teaching model hinders the improvement of students' written English language proficiency, critical thinking ability, and cross-cultural communication ability to some extent. Therefore, it is urgent for us to reform our teaching of English writing.

4. OBE and Teaching English Writing

OBE fully embodies the educational model that curriculum design, implementation, and evaluation should be guided by students' learning outcomes. When constructing an outcome-based teaching model of English writing, it is important to expound students' expected learning outcomes, ensuring that the curriculum goals, curriculum settings, teaching methods, and course assessments set by teachers are consistent with the evaluation of students' learning outcomes. Therefore, it is necessary to address the following issues:

4.1. Course Objectives

The traditional goal of teaching English writing is mainly to impart students' theoretical knowledge, while the concept of OBE needs to specify training objectives based on the needs of the subject (students) and the external (such as local employers). When setting the goals for English writing courses in the fundamental and higher education stages, it is important to consider the consistency of the goals in both stages, laying the foundation for students to acquire practical English writing skills. The teaching objective of the English writing course in the fundamental stage is to enable students to understand the thinking ways of Chinese and English and their differences in writing by correctly

mastering the components and structure of English sentences, and vocabulary usage, and being able to write English sentences, paragraphs, short essays, notes, and notices according to different requirements. The teaching goal of the English writing course in the higher stage is to further improve students' writing ability and proficiently master various genres of writing such as narration, description, exposition, and argumentation. Students will have a further understanding of English rhetoric and literary styles, and be able to use the correct format to write various business applications, project reports, term papers, and graduation thesis. The requirements of each stage should correspond to the demands for future employment. In addition, the teaching objectives of English writing in the two stages should be integrated with the ideological and political curriculum, guiding students to read relevant literature on excellent traditional Chinese culture in the process of English writing learning. Students are required to, on the basis of mastering fundamental cross-cultural communication knowledge, compare and analyze the differences between Western and Chinese culture, and establish cultural confidence and cultural identity, and thus establish correct socialist core values. Furthermore, teachers could guide students to understand the "Chinese Dream," "One Belt One Road," and the construction of Hainan Free Trade Port, etc., discover the moving people and events around them, learn from the people who has been granted the title of "Role Model of the Times," and be able to use English to praise them in this great era, tell Chinese stories, and practice English writing under the guidance of socialist core values, laying the foundation for cultivating applied English talents with solid English written skills, cross-cultural communication skills, critical thinking skills, and innovation skills. Finally, Huang Yuejin (2021) pointed out that "the course objectives can also be reflected by the curriculum matrix that corresponds the relationship between graduation requirements and the curriculum system,"^[6] and decompose the standards for talent cultivation objectives (abilities and literacy requirements) and implementation paths (such as corresponding knowledge points, teaching methods, etc.) of this course.

4.2. Course Curriculum

Nowadays, English writing is one of the key output skills for English majors, and the importance of English writing is reflected in the 'Teaching Guidelines for Undergraduate English Programs in Regular Higher Education Institutions' (2018).^[7] At present, most universities offering English programs do not arrange English writing courses in their first year, and knowledge related to English writing is taught in the comprehensive English curriculum. Many universities still offer English writing only in the first semester of their sophomore year, and the main purpose of their teaching is to prepare for the Test for English Majors-Band 4. When teaching, teachers tend to adopt a teaching approach to cope with professional exams, and students passively learn how to mechanically apply English writing skills. Based on the OBE, the content of teaching English writing should be practical and should be the knowledge that students need to learn, rather than the exam-oriented content taught by teachers. Schools should plan the overall content of English writing that students need to learn. Therefore, in terms of the curriculum of English writing, researchers suggest that English writing courses can be offered in the first to fourth grades of university. Lei Liping (2016) claimed that the content of teaching English writing should focus on the overall layout, and the learning goals and ultimate goals at different stages need to be linked in the OBE mode.^[8] In traditional teaching models, the curriculum reflects that teachers give priority to teaching, and students are passive recipients; OBE reflects the focus of curriculum design on what students ultimately learn and what they can do for future employment.

4.3. Teaching Styles

Under the guidance of the OBE educational model, the teaching method of English writing should highlight the classroom educational model of "student-centered and teacher-guided." In addition, except the face-to-face teaching practice between teachers and students in the classroom, teaching styles also need corresponding changes, including learning media, learning methods, learning time, and so on (Lei Liping, 2016).^[8] First, teachers could make videos about English writing teaching. The content of videos can be ranged from the concrete to the abstract and from simple to complex by the internal logic of the curriculum system and the cognitive abilities of students in different grades. The source of teaching videos can be completed by the faculty in curriculum team, or based on the different topics of each unit, allowing teachers and students to participate in making videos. Secondly, teachers could create or use existing resources of digital learning platforms. By using online platforms for English writing, teachers and students could share or exchange learning outcomes through various forms, such as testing, interaction, and discussion. On these platforms, teachers and students could achieve timely interaction and communication, students could improve their learning efficiency, and

teachers could provide online clarification for learning problems pointed out by students. At the same time, teachers not only need to guide and supervise students' online self-learning, such as learning time management, questioning, homework, etc., but also design teaching activities in the classroom to allow students to apply the knowledge they have learned. The teacher provides guidance by identifying problems in students' writing, and students can also communicate with each other. For example, teachers design group activities for a "Weekly Report," and each week there has one group to present a PowerPoint (PPT) in class, which requires team members to make PPT by selecting news materials related to the topic of the week's task from different websites such as China Daily and Xinhua Net (in English). Each member of the team will summarize and comment on relevant news. The news content involves cases embodying socialist core values, events from different countries along the "the Belt and Road," and latest reports of the construction of Hainan Free Trade Port. Through this activity, it is not only beneficial to improve students' English writing, but also to improve their English speaking.

4.4. Course Assessment

Under the guidance of the OBE, unlike traditional single-test assessment methods, English writing courses can adopt a diversified assessment approach. In addition to acquiring written English language skills, students should also develop cross-cultural communication skills, critical thinking skills, problem-analyzing and problem-solving abilities. Therefore, in addition to general writing tests to assess students' English writing, reflective journal entries, English writing journals, group project presentations (such as reading journal writing portfolios, thematic wall poster exhibition, Weekly Report, etc.), peer-to-peer evaluations, and other methods can be used to assess students' writing abilities. Taking the assessment method of the Weekly Report as an example, students work in small groups, and group members use PPT to present summaries of news material and personal comments in class according to the task requirements. A maximum score of 10 points is calculated, with the teacher's scores accounting for 4% and the peers' scores accounting for 6%. The teacher's evaluation mainly involves grammar, namely, verb forms, articles, prepositions, word choice, sentence structure, and other grammatical items. The peers' evaluation is whether the presenter spoke clearly whether the presenter spoke at a good volume, whether the presenter spoke at a good pace, whether the presenter faced the audience, whether the presenter appeared relaxed, whether the presenter stood straight, and whether the content of the presentation could catch the audience's attention, and whether the presenter showed some good examples, whether the presenter could make a good conclusion, whether the presenter's topic is interesting. The score range is from one to five, with one being dissatisfied and five being very satisfied, scoring in ascending order. It is important to note that according to the requirements of the assessment, the final grades of the group is the sum of the teacher's and the peer's evaluation, and students present and complete work in these classes amounts to points towards their final grades. Therefore, the final grade will be an average grade made by the contributions of each student in the group. In order to obtain higher scores, when each team member is preparing for each page of the PPT, they have to work hard to negotiate and mutually revise the pages they have made. This is beneficial to improving students' English writing skills and their teamwork ability.

5. Conclusion

Based on the concept of OBE, this program aims to reforming the English writing course in order to allow students to learn independently according to expected learning outcomes, transform teachers from the traditional classroom teaching mode, and concentrate on student's individual learning. Further, teachers could encourage each student to join groups learning and to stimulate their learning enthusiasm. Meanwhile, teaching English writing in class could adopt peer evaluation, task-based teaching, group cooperation, and other methods for mixing online and offline teaching on the ground of student-centered learning format. Through this reformed teaching paradigm, it is beneficial to enhance students' enthusiasm for interactive learning and their confidence in English writing, which plays a positive role in cultivating applied English talents.

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