

# Research on Bilingual Teaching Reform of Foreign Trade Correspondence Based on OBE Concept

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**Abstract:** *Foreign Trade Correspondence is a core course widely offered in international economics and trade majors in universities and colleges across China and is a bilingual course in the field. The traditional bilingual teaching of Foreign Trade Correspondence generally suffers from problems such as deviation between teaching content and social needs, insufficient interactions in classroom and lack of practice, disconnection between content and language, simple learning evaluation methods and so on. Based on the concept of Outcome Based Education (OBE), this article proposes reforms in the bilingual teaching of the course, including optimizing textbooks and teaching content, making reverse classroom design, reform of teaching mode, introduction of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) teaching strategy, and implementation of diversified evaluation on learning outcome. The aim is to provide constructive suggestions for improving the quality of bilingual teaching and learning of the course.*

**Keywords:** *Outcome-based Education (OBE), Foreign Trade Correspondence, Bilingual Teaching, Teaching Reform, Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL)*

## 1. Introduction

Bilingual teaching refers to the teaching of nonlinguistic subjects that partially or entirely use foreign languages in classroom teaching activities, and its essence varies depending on the country or region. According to the requirements of the Ministry of Education in China, universities across the country are carrying out bilingual teaching of professional courses to varying degrees, and international trade majors with strong foreign-related characteristics are also one of the pilot majors for bilingual teaching stipulated by the Ministry of Education [1]. Taking the author's college as an example, Foreign Trade Correspondence is an important course offered in the International Economics and Trade major. This course organically integrates English with foreign trade business, focusing on cultivating students' ability to write foreign trade letters and emails, as well as their ability to operate and negotiate foreign trade business processes in real or simulated business environments. It is designed to help students enter society and work as salespersons, and other foreign trade positions, effectively use correspondence to conduct business contacts, communications, negotiations, and transactions, successfully complete work tasks, and lay a solid foundation for improving foreign trade performance.

Correspondence is an important means of international business communication, and the teaching quality of Foreign Trade Correspondence directly affects the training effect of foreign trade talents. Traditional teaching has obvious shortcomings in the aspects of teaching objectives, teaching content, teaching strategies, and teaching evaluation, such as excessive emphasis on imparting theoretical knowledge, disconnection between teaching content and social needs, and neglect of cultivating students' practical application abilities. This leads to a lack of positive learning attitudes and clear learning motivations among students, seriously affecting the actual teaching effectiveness of the course. Therefore, improving the teaching effectiveness of the course through reform has become an urgent problem to be solved.

## 2. Problems in Bilingual Teaching of the Course

Throughout the years, based on the important position of the Foreign Trade Correspondence course in professional talent cultivation and the favorable learning conditions for students in bilingual courses, our team has continuously explored and reformed teaching with excellent professional skills, diligent and serious attitude, and innovative spirit, accumulating valuable experience and achieving good teaching

results, receiving unanimous praise from students and peers. However, due to various factors and limitations, the bilingual teaching of the course still shows the drawbacks of traditional teaching methods, and there is still much room for further improvement.

### ***2.1 Lack of Quality Textbooks Leading to Deviation between Teaching Content and Social Needs***

According to the requirements of the Ministry of Education, bilingual teaching in universities should use excellent and advanced original foreign language textbooks. However, almost no textbooks of Foreign Trade Correspondence are written by native English speakers. The existing textbooks are mostly compiled by peers from domestic universities, with a few being in English and most being bilingual in Chinese and English. The English expressions in all textbooks are to some extent not native, professional, or even not correct. Chinese-English bilingual textbooks, although helpful for students' self-learning, also lead to many students only reading Chinese and neglecting English, which is not conducive to the cultivation of students' English thinking and greatly reduces the effectiveness of bilingual teaching.

On the other hand, many textbooks haven't updated in a timely manner, leading to outdated sample letters and cases, overly emphasized formality and courtesy of language, ignored mainstream communication mode and language characteristics in the foreign trade industry. Therefore, it is difficult to reflect the latest changes and dynamics in current foreign trade practices, resulting in a disconnect between the training objectives of the course and social needs. When designing teaching activities, teachers failed to integrate the necessary abilities needed by foreign trade practitioners, resulting in students still lack of relevant professional skills and are unable to perform job duties even after completing this course.

### ***2.2 Traditional Teaching Mode Leading to Insufficient Classroom Interaction and Practice***

Due to various reasons such as insufficient class hours, traditional classroom configuration and layout, and teachers' lack of proficiency in modern information technology, most teachers tend to adopt more convenient teaching methods in the classroom, explaining theoretical knowledge and practical operation methods, leaving students in a passive state of receiving knowledge. This traditional teaching model lacks deep level interactive communication, which makes it difficult for students to fully discuss and solve their learning questions, affects learning effectiveness, and fails to stimulate students' interest and enthusiasm in learning, as well as improve their ability for self-directed learning. In addition, due to the lack of practical experience, students are unable to apply their learned knowledge in real-life situations, making it difficult for them to proficiently carry out practical business operations and flexibly handle business problems.

### ***2.3 Lack of Inter-disciplinary Teachers Leading to Disconnection between Content and Language***

The course of "Foreign Trade Correspondence" not only emphasizes knowledge of foreign trade business, but also emphasizes English application ability, which puts forward high requirements for the quality of teachers. Teachers must possess two important qualities: proficiency in both foreign trade business and English writing. However, the fact is that teachers who are proficient in English skills usually do not have experience in foreign trade, and their foreign trade knowledge is obtained indirectly. Therefore, they tend to follow the textbook and focus too much on explaining language points in teaching. On the other hand, teachers who are proficient in foreign trade have weaker English skills and face difficulties in language switching and mastering professional terminology. They habitually use Chinese to teach professional knowledge during teaching, which shows a lack of effort in improving students' English communication skills. This has led to a disconnect between language application skills and foreign trade business skills, making it difficult to achieve organic integration. Students find it difficult to proficiently use English to effectively communicate in foreign trade business, and their practical operational abilities have not been correspondingly improved.

### ***2.4 The Simple Method of Learning Evaluation Leading to Difficulty of Measuring Students' True Level***

Foreign Trade Correspondence is a skill-based course with strong practicality and operability, and the evaluation of the learning process is very important. After continuous optimization, the learning evaluation methods of the course in the author's college are divided into formative evaluation and final evaluation, with each accounting for half of the proportion. Formative evaluation focuses on students'

daily performance, including attendance, classroom performance, homework completion, etc. The final evaluation is conducted in the form of a final exam, with students' exam scores as the sole indicator. Although the proportion of formative assessment has increased to 50%, it is not difficult to see that in most cases, the subject of learning evaluation is only teachers, which may cause unfairness and bias in the evaluation results due to the emotional factors mixed in by teachers during the evaluation process. In addition, both regular and final evaluation methods tend to focus more on what students know but cannot truly measure whether students can effectively fulfill in foreign trade business.

### **3. Overview of OBE Concept**

Outcome-based Education (OBE) was proposed by Spady in 1981. It is a student-centered and outcome-oriented educational philosophy emphasizing that the educational process should be designed and implemented around the learning outcomes that students can ultimately achieve, with the aim of cultivating their practical abilities and comprehensive qualities [2]. Since its inception, the OBE concept has quickly gained high attention from educators and is considered the correct direction for pursuing excellence in education. It has been widely practiced and applied in fields such as elementary education, higher education, and business training, achieving good teaching results. The core of OBE philosophy includes four aspects: clear learning outcomes, student-centered teaching methods, flexible and diverse teaching tools, and continuous evaluation and feedback. This concept has high application value in the construction of excellent courses and has been proven to be beneficial for improving teaching effectiveness.

### **4. Bilingual Teaching Reform of the Course Based on OBE Concept**

#### ***4.1 Optimize Textbooks and Teaching Content to Ensure Synchronization with Social Needs***

Under the OBE concept, the starting point of instructional design is to determine learning outcomes and goals based on the employer's requirements for the abilities required for graduates to engage in relevant job positions in the future, as well as the internal and external needs of learners. The achievement of learning outcomes cannot be separated from the support of teaching content. To address the issues of a lack of excellent textbooks, slow updates, and a disconnect between teaching content and social needs, we have made attempts and reforms in the following three aspects.

##### ***4.1.1 Carefully Select Textbooks***

When it comes to textbooks, we insist that they should be either well-known, excellent, unique or new. We use the professionalism, accuracy, and timeliness of the textbook content as scoring indicators, and select the textbook with the highest score from a large number of textbooks available.

##### ***4.1.2 Update Teaching Content***

Based on the textbook, we closely monitor the latest trend in the foreign trade industry, timely integrate the newest letter formats, communication modes, industry norms, etc. into teaching, and combine with the actual work experience of foreign trade business personnel to cite or design targeted teaching cases and practical training projects, ensuring that learning outcomes are highly in line with industry needs.

##### ***4.1.3 Strengthen Cooperation with Enterprises***

Our team actively explore close cooperation with foreign trade enterprises, inviting enterprise practitioners to take part in course design, textbook writing, and teaching activities, providing internship and practical training opportunities for students. Therefore, students can practice and improve their professional skills in real work environments. In addition, timely understanding of the latest industry demands resulting from cooperation with enterprises, provides a basis for curriculum adjustment and optimization.

#### ***4.2 Clarify Learning Objectives and Make Reverse Classroom Design***

After carefully selecting textbooks and improving teaching content to ensure synchronization with social needs, we have carried out the following two reforms in teaching design:

#### ***4.2.1 Accurately Define Learning Objectives and Learning Outcomes***

Foreign trade salespersons need to master knowledge of foreign trade business and English correspondence, obtain key information from correspondence and provide timely and correct feedback. After clarifying the overall learning objectives, it is necessary to refine the results of this course into each unit and teaching session, combined with specific foreign trade business processes, to consider the following questions: What aspects of foreign trade business and English correspondence knowledge do students need to master? What key information is needed to obtain from the correspondence? How to provide accurate feedback? Guided by these questions, we define precisely the learning objectives and outputs for each class, thereby determining those of the course.

#### ***4.2.2 Make Reverse Classroom Design***

After clarifying the learning outcomes and training objectives, we carry out a "student-centered" teaching design. Based on the knowledge of both foreign trade business and English correspondence that each class needs to master, how to obtain key information in correspondence, and how to give correct feedback, we design corresponding classroom activities, organize teaching sessions, and achieve a combination of classroom teaching and extracurricular teaching, theory and practice, so that students can fully obtain corresponding learning outcomes and achieve teaching goals.

#### ***4.3 Reform Teaching Mode to Enhance Classroom Interactions and practice***

In terms of teaching mode, we keep up with the times, actively utilize modern information technology, explore different classroom modes, improve effective interaction with students, increase students' practical opportunities, and achieve good results.

##### ***4.3.1 Flipped Classroom and Blended Learning***

In classroom teaching, we make full use of multimedia, online learning platforms, video tutorials, etc. to explain theoretical knowledge before class, allowing students more time for interactive activities such as group discussions, case analysis, and role-playing in class. As a result, we achieve the effect of a comprehensive coverage of knowledge, an enhanced level of classroom interaction, a promoted degree of students' active learning and deep thinking.

##### ***4.3.2 Introduce Project-based Learning***

We carefully design project tasks that are close to the foreign trade practice, such as writing authentic foreign trade letters and e-mails so that students can learn, apply, and reflect on the knowledge they have learned in the process of completing the project. Through project practice, students' practical operation ability and adaptability can be enhanced.

#### ***4.4 Reform Teaching Strategies to Achieve Deep Integration of Content and Language***

Under the OBE philosophy, teaching activities should revolve around learning outcomes. How to effectively help students achieve corresponding learning outcomes is a major challenge faced by teachers. On the one hand, our team actively participate in training to enhance their abilities in both foreign trade business and English writing teaching. On the other hand, in response to the characteristics of the course, we have explored and reformed teaching strategies, introducing the Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) strategy, and striving to effectively integrate content and language in teaching.

##### ***4.4.1 Introducing CLIL Teaching Strategy to Integrate Content and Language***

CLIL is an emerging teaching strategy that integrates language and content. This strategy believes that language and content are equally important, and language is used as a tool for teaching other subjects in the classroom. It is organically integrated with teaching content, allowing students to learn subject content from different perspectives while improving their language learning and oral expression abilities unconsciously<sup>[3]</sup>. In the teaching activities of the course, we try to use English as the main teaching language, explain the corresponding foreign trade business knowledge, introduce different scenarios of letter writing in different foreign trade business sections, and guide students to interpret letters and obtain key information.

##### ***4.4.2 Create Situational Teaching and Clarify Learning Outcome Goals***

Around the learning outcome goals, we carefully simulate foreign trade business scenarios, so that the classroom content is closely focused on this goal, ensuring that teaching activities are targeted,

helping students improve their language application ability while acquiring professional knowledge and skills, and achieving effective communication in English for different aspects of foreign trade business, eliminating the phenomenon of content and language disconnection in students' learning.

#### ***4.5 Implement Diversified Evaluation and Comprehensively Consider Learning Outcomes***

The evaluation of course learning refers to the use of certain evaluation methods by the evaluation subject, with corresponding evaluation objectives as reference, to evaluate the learning status of the evaluation object after a certain stage. Its purpose is to discover students' learning problems at a certain stage, improve teaching, enhance students' learning effectiveness, and better promote students' comprehensive development [4]. In order to truly measure whether students have the ability to effectively communicate in foreign trade business, we believe that reforms should be carried out from the following three aspects.

##### ***4.5.1 Diversify Evaluation Subjects to Ensure Fair and Just Evaluation***

We should break the traditional single teacher evaluation model, introduce multiple evaluation subjects such as student self-evaluation, peer evaluation, and enterprise evaluation to jointly participate in the evaluation process, to ensure the comprehensiveness and fairness of the evaluation results.

##### ***4.5.2 Diversify Evaluation Methods to Comprehensively Assess Learning Outcomes***

We should build a diversified evaluation approach that is no longer limited to knowledge memory and understanding, but incorporates multiple aspects such as skill application, practical ability, teamwork, and innovative thinking into the assessment system to comprehensively evaluate students' learning outcomes and ensure the comprehensiveness of the evaluation.

##### ***4.5.3 Emphasize the Evaluation of the Entire Process and Pay Attention to the Sustainable Development of Students***

We emphasize the evaluation of the entire learning process of students, pay attention to their progress, effort level, and changes in learning attitudes during the learning process, to promote their sustained development and comprehensive growth, and ensure the dynamic and developmental nature of the evaluation.

## **5. Conclusions**

The bilingual teaching reform of the course "Foreign Trade Correspondence" based on the OBE concept has effectively solved many drawbacks in the traditional teaching mode and significantly improved teaching quality and effectiveness by optimizing textbooks and teaching content, clarifying learning outcomes and making reverse classroom design, reforming teaching modes and strategies, and introducing a diversified evaluation system. The reform not only enhances classroom interaction and practice, but also achieves a deep integration of content and language, promoting the comprehensive improvement of students' business wiring and communication abilities in foreign trade, laying a solid foundation for cultivating high-quality talents.

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