

Research on Teaching Reform of Business English Graduation Thesis (Design) Writing Course for Application-Oriented Undergraduate Students Based on OBE Concept

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Abstract

The academic thesis writing course for Business English majors in application-oriented undergraduate colleges urgently needs teaching reform. Taking Business English major of B University as an example, this paper intends to introduce the OBE (Outcome-Based Education) concept into the teaching of the graduation thesis (design) writing course, adhere to a student-centered and outcome-oriented approach, and redesign and continuously optimize the course according to the four steps of Defining, Realizing, Assessing, and Using learning outcomes. The teaching objectives are updated; the teaching mode is reconstructed, including integrating teaching content, adjusting teaching progress, and innovating teaching methods; a diversified comprehensive evaluation system is built; and the actual output is dynamically tracked for constant reflection and continuous optimization. The aim is to effectively enhance the course's guidance on the graduation thesis (design) process.

Keywords

OBE, Graduation Thesis (Design) Writing Course, Business English Major

1. Introduction

The latest edition of the National Teaching Quality Standards for Undergraduate Majors in Colleges and Universities was officially released on January 30, 2018, which also covers the "Teaching Quality Standards for Undergraduate Business English Majors in Colleges and Universities" (hereinafter referred to as the "New

National Standards”) formulated by the English Teaching Steering Committee of the Ministry of Education. The “New National Standards” (HETSC, 2018) has made specific requirements for the graduation thesis of business English majors: “The graduation thesis focuses on the comprehensive application of students’ business English and professional knowledge, as well as practical and innovative ability.” The graduation thesis, which must meet the industry or academic norms and be written in English with no less than 5000 words, can be in practical form or academic form. The practical category includes project reports (e.g., business plans, marketing proposals, case studies, translations and reviews, etc.) and research reports (e.g., enterprise, industry, market research analysis, etc.) (Cao, 2019). Business English thesis (design) writing course, as the most relevant graduation thesis (design) guidance course, plays a very important role in the training of business English majors.

However, at present, many academic thesis writing courses for business English majors in application-oriented colleges and universities have not achieved the real and effective support and combination of the course and graduation thesis (design), and it is urgent to carry out teaching reform. The main problems include: First, the original course name is “Scientific Research Methods and Paper Writing”, which mainly teaches the requirements of topic selection, format specification, literature search, writing methods of research proposal and literature review, and writing requirements of paper body, etc., which is highly theoretical; Second, students do not fully understand the categories and styles of practical graduation projects in the course learning, which leads to the fear of practical project reports and research reports in the graduation thesis (design). Even if the topic is selected with the encouragement of the instructor, there will be many difficulties in the follow-up research process.

In view of this, this paper intends to take Business English major of B University as an example, introduce the concept of OBE (outcome-oriented education) into the teaching of graduation thesis (design) writing course, adhere to the student-centered and outcome-oriented, and redesign and continuously optimize the course. The aim is to effectively enhance the course’s guidance on graduation thesis (design) process and provide a reference for the reform of the graduation thesis (design) writing course for business English majors in other application-oriented universities.

2. Literature Review

OBE (Outcome-based education) was developed in the 1980s and 1990s, and then promoted in Australia, Canada, New Zealand and other countries, becoming the mainstream idea of higher education teaching reform in Europe and the United States (Mo, 2019). Its representative, Spady (1994), elaborated on the core concept of OBE in his book *Outcome-based Education: Critical Issues and Answers*. Its main point of view is that the goal of teaching design and teaching implementation is the final learning outcome achieved by students through the

education process, emphasizing that the design, organization and reconstruction of the education process focus on how to achieve the expected learning outcome of students. American scholar Acharya (2003) proposed four steps to realize outcome-based education: defining learning outcome, realizing learning outcome, assessing learning outcome, and using learning outcome. According to the concept of OBE, talent demand is both the starting point and the end point, and the process of talent training is to keep the goal consistent with the outcome (Li, 2014).

Since the Ministry of Education promoted the certification of engineering education in 2006, the OBE education concept has been promoted and applied in China, and has begun to be applied to other subjects of education. In the field of business English, the promotion and application of OBE education concept has appeared since 2017 and shown an increasing trend year by year, but it is mostly concentrated in the cultivation model of business English talents and some core business English courses, such as Comprehensive Business English, Business English Listening and Speaking, International Business English Translation, Business English Correspondence and other courses. As a new undergraduate major, there are relatively few research results on the course of business English thesis (design) writing, so it is urgent to apply the OBE concept to the teaching reform of this course.

3. Teaching Reform Practice Based on OBE

Under the guidance of the OBE concept, the writing course of business English graduation thesis follows the reform idea of reverse design and positive implementation. According to the four steps of Defining, Realizing, Assessing, and Using learning outcomes, the writing course of business English graduation thesis redesigns the teaching objectives, teaching content, teaching methods and teaching evaluation system, and maintains constant reflection and continuous improvement in practice.

3.1. Defining Learning Outcome

According to the requirements of the New National Standard on the content and form of the graduation thesis (design) for Business English majors, combined with the talent training orientation of application-oriented undergraduate colleges and the talent training objectives for business English majors, with the opportunity of revising the talent training plan for 2024 edition, the course name was changed from “Scientific Research Method and Paper Writing” to “Graduation Project (Thesis) Writing” on the basis of learning situation analysis, expert demonstration and course group discussion, highlighting “design first and paper as a supplement”. At the same time, the graduation requirements supported by the course are revised from 2.1 Language knowledge (M), 2.2 Language skills (H), 3.1 Business knowledge (M), 3.2 Business skills (M), 7.1 Critical thinking (L) to 2.2 Language skills (H), 3.2 Business skills (M), 7.1 Critical thinking (H).

On this basis, the teaching objectives are updated to fully reflect the characteristics of business English graduation project (thesis) writing course.

The original teaching objectives of the course are:

- To be familiar with the standards and characteristics of academic research, to master the necessary methods and steps of academic research, to understand the ethics of academic research, and to have the basic research ability of humanities and social sciences.
- To master the basic formats and norms of English academic paper writing, to be able to select appropriate topics, and write academic research papers, graduation theses and practice reports in English with the help of corresponding research methods.
- To practice honest, trustworthy, rigorous and responsible research ethics, to exercise and enhance logical thinking, critical thinking, innovative consciousness and craftsman spirit.
- While the revised teaching objectives are as follows:
- To understand the standards and characteristics of academic research, be familiar with the ethical standards of academic research, and master the basic formats and norms of writing English academic papers, and to make preliminary use of corresponding research methods to write business English academic papers.
- To clarify the advantages, categories and style requirements of the graduation project, and comprehensively apply interdisciplinary knowledge to write the business English graduation project.
- To enhance problem awareness and critical thinking, and initially apply logical thinking and innovative thinking to solve practical problems in academic research and business fields.

After the revision of the overall goal of the course, the course unit goal is refined and implemented step by step, and the teaching is modular and project-oriented to make the course more practical, reasonable and scientific.

3.2. Realizing Learning Outcome

In order to achieve the above teaching objectives, this course reconstructs the classroom teaching mode, integrates the teaching content and progress, and innovates the teaching methods and means.

1) The teaching content and progress are integrated to create a two-module teaching content system of “graduation design + graduation thesis”. In terms of teaching content, the original course “Scientific Research Methods and Paper Writing” mainly focuses on the topic selection skills of academic papers, format specifications, literature retrieval, writing methods of research proposals and literature reviews, and writing requirements of paper text, etc., which is highly theoretical. On the basis of the existing teaching content of academic papers, the reformed Graduation Project (Thesis) Writing adds the content of practical graduation project, including the characteristics and advantages of graduation project,

the source and skills of graduation project topic selection, the classification and style of graduation project, and the framework setting of graduation project. At the same time, the market research method and market data analysis, which are closely related to business English major and in line with the requirements of the new national standard, are included in the teaching. The students are guided to selecting more practical topics than theoretical topics. In terms of teaching progress, the original “Scientific Research Methods and Thesis Writing” studied the entire research process of graduation thesis sequentially in 16 teaching weeks throughout the semester, while the reformed “Graduation Design (Thesis) Writing” adopted the “2 + 4+ 10” teaching progress, and studies the writing skills of academic graduation thesis in the first two weeks. In the following 4 weeks, students will learn the writing requirements of practical graduation design, and in the last 10 weeks students will determine the topic in a group, learn the operation of each process of graduation thesis (design), and collaborate to complete projects at each stage. In order to meet the needs of the adjustment of teaching content and schedule, the teacher will spend more time and energy on compiling practical graduation project handout, which is in line with the characteristics of application-oriented undergraduate and professional training objectives on the basis of the existing academic graduation thesis textbooks “Business English Essay Writing” and “APA Research Paper Writing Standards”.

2) Teaching methods and means are innovated, and an online and offline mixed teaching model of “flipped classroom + project-based teaching + collaborative learning” is built to fully integrate traditional teaching with information-based teaching. The OBE concept emphasizes “student-centered”. Therefore, this course, based on the principle of respecting students’ individual needs, implements flipped classroom, project-based teaching and team collaborative learning to make the learning process more open and personalized. This attracts students to participate in classroom activities to a greatest extent, thus improving students’ enthusiasm and initiative in learning.

a) Adopting flipped classroom.

After systematically sorting out the knowledge related to academic papers and graduation projects by modules, the teacher will build courses on the Xuexitong platform, upload digital learning resources such as relevant micro-lessons, PPT, question bank and supplementary materials, and set up corresponding tasks. Students will conduct online self-learning and testing before class to complete corresponding tasks and make full preparation for offline classroom teaching. This is a process of independent learning and exploration, which can greatly exercise the consciousness and initiative of learning. In offline classroom teaching, teachers do not directly indoctrinate students with knowledge, but answer questions and solve doubts. Teachers and students jointly participate in the discussion of knowledge in relevant modules, and finally achieve the purpose of clarifying knowledge and solving problems, so that students’ acceptance of knowledge is more active and more internalized. Flipped classroom realizes the trans-

formation of the roles of teachers and students, breaks the time and space restrictions of traditional classroom teaching, and helps realize innovative teaching under the concept of OBE.

b) Adopting project-based collaborative learning.

Project-driven collaborative learning, through the real graduation thesis (design) writing project, allows students to consult literature and integrate data independently in a group, take the initiative to solve practical problems through knowledge transfer in a real situation, and can directly experience the various stages of graduation thesis (design) research, and comprehensively improve the research ability of graduation thesis (design). The following projects are set up in this course:

Project 1: getting familiar with business English academic papers;

Project 2: clarifying Business English graduation design;

Project 3: determining group research topics;

Project 4: determining research methods;

Project 5: abiding by academic ethics (APA format specifications);

Project 6: writing literature review;

Project 7: writing research proposal;

Project 8: final paper.

The teacher is transformed from the leader of the class to the designer and evaluator of the class. During the implementation of the project, the teacher carefully observes the progress and trend of each group of students, inspires the students' thinking, guides the students to successfully complete the transition between different stages, and truly realizes the outcome-oriented classroom teaching.

3.3. Assessing Learning Outcome

Evaluation of learning outcome is an important part of measuring learning outcomes. Based on the revised teaching objectives, this course constructs a comprehensive evaluation system with diversified assessment forms, contents and processes, and explores how to improve the flexibility and echelon of evaluation and assessment, enhance the effectiveness of evaluation and promote learning, so as to fully reflect the real outcome of the whole teaching process. This course implements the "N + 1" assessment and evaluation scheme. Where N = 3, including module test, research proposal, reflection notes; "1" is a literature review. The specific items and their proportion are shown in **Table 1**. The score of

Table 1. Assessment items and their proportion.

Assessment items	Formative assessment item 1	Formative assessment item 2	Formative assessment item 3	Final assessment
Form	module test	literature review	research proposal	final paper
Proportion	20%	15%	15%	50%

the module tests in assessment item 1 accounts for 20%, and the implementation plan is like this: teachers release phased test questions on the Xuexitong platform, and students complete the test in the offline class within a limited time. The score of literature review in assessment item 2 accounts for 15%, and the implementation plan is like this: teachers publish the scoring standards to the Xuexitong platform in advance, and students consult and sort out relevant literature for the topic in small groups, write a complete literature review according to the requirements, and upload it to the Xuexitong platform. Then each group makes a presentation in the offline class, and the teacher and other groups make comment. The score of research proposal in assessment item 3 accounts for 15%, and the implementation plan is like this: teachers publish the scoring standard in advance, students decide the research methods for the group thesis (design), formulate a research plan, write a complete research proposal according to the format requirements, upload it to the Xuexitong platform, and make a presentation in the offline class, and the teacher and other groups make comment. The score of the final paper in assessment item 4 accounts for 50%, and the implementation plan is for students to write a complete paper (design) with no less than 1500 words according to the format of the graduation thesis for English majors, and the teacher comment on it.

3.4. Using Learning Outcome

The last step is to use learning outcome to continuously improve teaching quality.

1) Teachers pay attention to the key points of the achievement of teaching goals, dynamically track the outcome in the process, find and solve problems in time. The course adopts the method of “process assessment + final examination” for comprehensive evaluation, and its weight is 0.5 and 0.5 respectively. The comprehensive scores of business English majors in Grade 2021 were analyzed, and the achievement of course goals (final examination) was 0.8730. The achievement degree of the course goal (formative evaluation) is 0.8263, and the achievement of sub-course goals is as follows: the achievement degree of course goal 1 is 0.6418, the achievement degree of course goal 2 is 0.9200, and the achievement degree of course goal 3 is 0.9170. The total achievement degree of course objectives (=achievement degree of course objectives (final examination) × weight + achievement degree of course objectives (formative evaluation) × weight) is $0.8263 \times 0.5 + 0.8730 \times 0.5 = 0.8497$. This major sets the achievement standard of the graduation requirement evaluation result as “0.70 is qualified”, so the achievement degree of the course goal meets the expectation, and the course goal is achieved.

Through the analysis of the achievement of the course objectives, it is found that there are some problems:

a) In the formative evaluation, the achievement degree of course objectives 1 is only 0.6418, so it is “not achieved”. The evaluation form is module test, which focuses on the understanding and mastery of the knowledge about the standards

and characteristics of academic research, the necessary methods and steps of academic research, the ethics of academic research, the characteristics and style requirements of graduation project. This shows that students' mastery of basic knowledge has not met the requirements to a certain extent, and needs to be further improved.

b) For the learning of literature review, proposal report and final paper, the course all carries out inquiry-based and cooperative learning in groups. Some students have low participation or their roles are relatively fixed, and they wander away from the edge of the learning community, which affects the effect of group collaborative learning.

In order to solve the above problems, it is proposed to carry out specific improvement work from the following aspects:

i) The flipped classroom model is to further implemented, and the students are required to watch the basic knowledge micro-lessons repeatedly in advance on the Xuexitong platform, so as to do a good preview and review. At the same time, teachers, continuing to adhere to the student-centered model, carry out targeted guidance and other measures to consolidate students' basic knowledge.

ii) The students' understanding of the learning community and their sense of participation and cooperation is to be further enhanced through publicity and explanation. Students with strong learning and leadership ability will lead other members in the group. Tasks will be assigned according to their own abilities, and necessary assistance should be provided, so that students with poor participation can experience the fun of cooperative learning and feel the progress they have made in the process of completing tasks. When appropriate, such students will serve as group leaders to further strengthen their organization, coordination, management and participation capabilities, and promote the construction and development of learning communities.

2) Teachers track and investigate the rules of students' topic selection for graduation thesis (design), analyze the consistency and difference between actual outcome and expected outcome, and constantly make a summary, reflection and rectification. An iterative cycle of quality inspection and evaluation, discovery and diagnosis, feedback and improvement will be gradually formed. The author made a statistical analysis on the topics of graduation thesis (design) of Business English major in B University from 2022 to 2024, and found the following trend (as shown in **Table 2**): There were 91 graduation papers (designs) in 2022, of which 54 were practical, accounting for 59.3%; There are 89 graduation papers (designs) in 2023, of which 66 are practical, accounting for 74.2%; There are 102 graduation papers (designs) in 2024, of which 87 are practical, accounting for 85.3%. Obviously, the overall number of practical graduation project (thesis) topics has been on the rise in the past three years. It can be seen that since 2022, the course reform of "Graduation Design (thesis) Writing" under the guidance of OBE concept has achieved certain results, effectively guiding students to shift from theoretical graduation thesis research to practical graduation design research.

Table 2. Statistical analysis on the topics of graduation thesis (design) of Business English major in B University from 2022 to 2024.

Year	Total	Practical	Proportion (practical)
2022	91	54	59.3%
2023	89	66	74.2%
2024	102	87	85.3%

4. Conclusion

In summary, based on the concept of OBE, this paper studies the teaching reform of the graduation thesis (design) writing course of Business English major in B University, following the reform idea of reverse design and forward implementation. According to the four steps of Defining, Realizing, Assessing, and Using learning outcomes, the teaching objectives, teaching content, teaching methods, and teaching evaluation system are redesigned, emphasizing “student-centered, outcome-oriented”, and constant reflection and improvement are made in practice. The teaching reform has broken the “walking on one leg” mode of graduation thesis (design) teaching, deepened the learning content to the application level. What’s more, it conforms to the requirements of the “New National Standards”, effectively improves the effective guiding role of the course on graduation thesis (design), and provides a feasible reference for the reform of business English graduation thesis (design) writing courses in similar application-oriented undergraduate institutions. However, the study and data collection period is 2022 to 2024, which is not long enough to fully reflect the long-term impact and effectiveness of OBE-based educational reforms on student achievement, and the reform and research need to be continued over the long term.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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