Analysis on the Embodiment of OBE in Cultivation
of Business English Majors

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Abstract: OBE (outcomes-based education) concept is highly accepted in talent cultivation of application-oriented specialty at present. Business English as such one stresses that its graduates must fit into China's international activities, particularly of foreign trade. This paper tries to figure out what the outcomes in this specialty cultivation are and consequently how the transformation in the pedagogical practice can be made. Through literature reading and questionnaire research on both graduates and undergraduates, it is found that so-called outcomes mainly is, along with other regular requirement for talents, specifically composed of language competence and business practical capabilities which are critical both for graduates' career promotion and enterprises' human resource construction. Based on these findings, suggestions on teaching process, faculty promotion, facilities and assessment have been made to upgrade the pedagogical practice so as to meet students' need as well as that of enterprises. All these measures synthetically work to promote the current weak position of practical training so as to achieve the balance between theoretical teaching and practical training for the need mentioned.

Keywords: OBE；outcomes；Needs；Cultivation of Business English majors

Introduction

Over the past 40 years of China's reform and opening up, its higher education has made much progress to reach the world level in terms of scale, and the upper middle level as a whole. In this context, the first *National Criteria for the Teaching Quality of Undergraduate Majors in General Colleges and Universities (Foreign Language and Literature)* [1] was issued by the Ministry of education, and then the *Teaching Guideline of Undergraduate Foreign Language and Literature Majors in General Colleges and Universities* [2] was produced by the Teaching Steering Committee of foreign language and literature majors in Colleges and universities of the Ministry of Education. The *Guideline* [2] makes a comprehensive elaboration on the training specifications of Business English majors, which are divided into 12 thin articles, covering the three requirements for quality, knowledge and ability. Closely adhering to the requirements of talents in the Internet era and the characteristics of application-oriented majors, it attempts to build a multi-dimensional training program for business English majors to ensure the realization of the training of "inter-disciplinary talents for international issues" [2]. It clearly points out that we should "implement the educational concept of center on students, output orientation and continuous improvement". "Output oriented" and "continuous improvement" are actually the core ideas of the OBE concept which proposed by Spady [3] and focuses on outcomes in education, that is, teaching should fully meet the needs of students' personal development coupled with employers' needs, ensuring that students can adapt to the changing requirements of the times, and the acquired knowledge and ability can support their whole life with the scalability of learning results. It is also a close coincidence between the cultivation target of Business English majors and the core spirit of OBE. Therefore effective embodiment of such concept into pedagogical activities needs educators' attention and thinking.

1. Literature Review

1.1 Brief Introduction of OBE

In the middle and late 20th century, the United States was not satisfied with the contribution of education in science and technology, especially when the Soviet Union preempted the launch of artificial earth satellites, Americans began to think about the practicality of education and the importance of educational achievements. Based on this, American scholar William Spady [3] put forward the concept of OBE (Outcome-Based Education) in 1981, which attaches importance to students' learning achievements rather than what they will receive in their education. Here the achievements refer to the maximum ability they can achieve after a certain stage of learning, and can continue to improve ongoing. This concept believes that as long as students get the right educational opportunities, everyone can succeed. It focuses on "what learning outcomes students desire to achieve and why they are required to achieve these learning outcomes". It emphasizes four points, including what learning outcomes t students desire achieve, why students are required to make such achievements, how to effectively help students achieve these learning outcomes, and how to know that students have achieved these learning outcomes.

1.2 Study in foreign countries

This concept has been quickly recognized by the United States, European Union countries and other countries, and has become the mainstream concept of education reform in the United States, Canada, and Britain and so on. Among them, the American Association for engineering education certification (A-BET) applies this concept throughout their whole work, adhering to the certification concept and students' continuous improvement. Harden R.M [4] made his research on OBE'S chronicle development along with advantages and disadvantages. He made a conclusion of 12 advantages over traditional teaching pattern. Babane [5] made her investigation into the application of OBE principles in the teaching of African languages in the senior phase. She found that the investigated principles were not applied because of a lack of application strategies, the failure to interpret policy documents and resistance to change by teachers. Jane Battistini pointed out that teachers in the classroom play a key role in the successful implementation of OBE [6]. Kennedy [7] believes that policy, theory and practice interact with each other and jointly affect the implementation in teaching. Tania Rahman [8] seeks to address some of the key issues and questions in relation to the relevance of OBE in ELT in tertiary education in Bangladesh. It can be seen from the relevant literature that the foreign research on OBE mainly focuses on the basic content, including concept definition, concept elaboration, development analysis, model research and implementation points. The in-depth study of foreign basic content is conducive to helping Chinese scholars comprehensively understand OBE and master the implementation points of OBE, so as to lay a solid foundation for specific application practice research.

1.3 Study in China

Chinese scholars began their research on OBE in 2003, and it is in 2012 when this concept entered the vision of domestic educators [6]. In 2013 China joined the Washington Agreement and became a signatory member of the agreement, which means that China's engineering education certification equivalent to international substantive certification has also begun [9]. With the deepening of China's education reform, OBE concept has gradually expanded from the field of engineering education to other disciplines. Many educators have studied and tried OBE in the field of language teaching. For example, Yuan Shiliang [10] applied the OBE concept to English autonomous learning, and achieved good teaching results; Liu Chunyu and Zhang Ruilin [11] has proposed to cultivate talents based on professional needs by applying the OBE concept to business English writing, emphasizing the close integration of classroom teaching and practical work needs [6]. Chen Maochun [12] proposed to improve the cultivation of college students' English reasoning ability through entrepreneurship and innovation projects based on OBE. Ou Huaen [13] also proposed to emphasize the "learning output" of English majors with his mode composed of diversified evaluation subjects, diversified evaluation contents, dynamic evaluation methods and dynamic evaluation criteria. In recent years, many scholars such as Ben Peiyun [14] and Deng Xia [15] have linked the concept of OBE with the systematic engineering of talent training for Business English majors, which has improved the rationality of specialty construction. It can be found that Chinese scholars and educators put more emphasis on the reform and practice of OBE in teaching and less attention to comprehensive interpretation of what and for what reason the outcomes are.

2. Definition of Outcomes in Business English Cultivation

2.1 Interpretation of Business English Specialty

As an application-oriented major, Business English labels talent training with specified domains and professionalization, and its core lies in the cultivation of practical competence. Therefore a matrix must be established based on the guidance to achieve the goal, and clarify the core competence requirements to students. Only when each ability index has a corresponding course, and gives students personalized evaluation and real-time guidance for its revision, can we help students obtain substantial successful experience to adapt to the challenges of future life, so as to effectively help students achieve these learning outcomes. In order to export the talent training objectives stipulated in the *National Criteria* [1] and *Guidelines* [2] as achievements in application-oriented colleges and universities, it is necessary to ensure that they are highly matched with the actual needs, so as to realize the specialization and professionalization of talents. Business English specialty aim to

cultivate compound and applied Business English professionals who are proficient in using English to engage in business, economy and trade, management, finance and other work in the international environment.

2.2 Interpretation of Outcomes for Business English majors

Specifically speaking, for the cultivation of business English majors, outcomes can be defined as the "ultimate ability" to which students should promote after four years of study, that is, the five categories of ability summarized by American psychologist Gagn and his fellows, including verbal information, intellectual skills, cognitive strategies, skills and attitudes [16].

According to the theory of needs, the needs of foreign language education should include social needs and personal needs [17], which are the core basis for defining the learning achievements of business English majors, and also an important basis for inferring the success of talent training.

2.2.1. Social Needs for Business English graudates

Enterprises and employers are the majority of representatives of social demand toward graduates. In terms of language knowledge and skills, Shi Xingsong and Dengxia [18] found through investigation that employers have higher requirements for students' output skills in speaking and writing than reading, listening and translation. In terms of business knowledge and skills, general business skills, including office secretarial skills, information research skills, public speaking skills and business etiquette, are presented in the needs of employers. Professional business skills such as international trade knowledge and skills, marketing skills, human resource management skills, legal knowledge and financial management skills are also listed in the list of employment needs of most enterprises [18]. In terms of cross-cultural communication ability, some employers clearly require graduates to be equipped with cross-cultural capabilities of thinking, adaptation and communication.

Another data from Chinese famous online hunter named BOSS EMPLOYMENT, which has been building a channel between job hunters and employers, gives more detailed information. It shows that under the condition of having the same degree and the expected salary (the difference is controlled within 10%), job seekers who clearly have more than three vocational skills have a 19.2% higher probability of obtaining active communication from the employer than job seekers who only have one skill, and the advantage increases by 5% year-on-year in subsequent links such as obtaining interview invitations, the probability of success of compound talents is 15-22% higher [19]. The data also shows that the requirements for quality-oriented talents from enterprises are becoming more and more urgent, and higher requirements are put forward in terms of teamwork, interpersonal communication and coordination, stress resistance and emotional management, logical thinking, rapid learning and ability to solve complex problems.

In conclusion, social needs makes multi-dimensional and high-level application-oriented "synthesis" as "learning outcomes", and more emphasis is placed on professional competence, that is, to meet the job needs in four aspects, work skills, technical tools, personal characteristics and professional experience. Specifically, employers hope that graduates have the ability to initially adapt to foreign trade, international business management and other foreign-related fields, such as oral language output, business skills, as well as the processing ability of information and interpersonal communication.

2.2.2. Personal Needs in Business English Study

Personal needs, or students' needs, include current situation needs and target situation needs [16]. For Business English majors, current situational needs, or can be renamed as learning needs, refer to the gap between students' current ESP level and the next stage level; the target situation needs are mainly to meet the position needs such as the English language knowledge and ability, business practice ability and other comprehensive abilities that should be possessed in career development. Therefore, it is safe to say that their personal needs are based on social needs, and the core part of the latter has become the internalized part of the former. For the purpose of tracking the quality of talent training, the author conducted an interview and questionnaire survey on 160 graduates of business English specialty in Hunan University of Arts and Science. The questionnaire includes three parts: the year of graduation, professional fields and specific positions currently engaged; learning experience of professional courses in school; their current career needs and suggestions on curriculum and teaching methods. The respondents are mainly working in the field of foreign trade, as well as English teaching, enterprise management and other fields. The research shows three important points given by graduates. They believe that professional knowledge, including English language knowledge, cross-cultural knowledge and foreign trade knowledge, is the basis of career development. At the same time, professional skills, including oral expression, business negotiation, marketing planning and computer technology application, are the rigid needs of career development. The third valuable point is that comprehensive quality, including coordination management, emotional management, stress management, communication and cooperation, is the guarantee of career development. The graduates also propose that teachers should put more concentration on output, or practical competence, rather than on theoretical teaching which has been the regular weakness in domestic applied-oriented teaching. It is suggested to increase the number of courses taught by expertise such as electronic cross-border commerce and maintain the durability of the cooperation between schools and enterprises, especially inserting projects into some professional courses such as Business Negotiation. In other words, students hope to get more practical exercises to avoid the disconnection between theory and skills so as to quickly adapt to the job and reduce the time cost of career development.

In conclusion, personal needs consider learning outcomes in a way more detailed than social needs. Students pursue more comprehensive language knowledge and ability in aspects of listening, speaking, reading, writing and translation as well as an improvement in cross-cultural communication skills. They desire not only to complete daily dialogues, but also accomplish specific tasks such as correspondence, negotiation, documentary, settlement, customer development and other positions in foreign trade, and adapt to tasks such as team management, performance management, and project development and so on. At the same time, students also hope to lay a good comprehensive foundation in time management, emotion management, communication, etiquette, teamwork, lifelong learning ability, etc.

3. Cultivation of Outcomes in Business English Study

As for another two points of OBE, namely, how to effectively help students achieve these outcomes and how to assess students' achievements, they actually refer to the high-quality implementation process of the cultivation of outcomes in Business English study. According to the *Guidelines* [2], it includes four aspects: teaching process, faculty construction, teaching conditions and quality management.

3.1 Focus on Teaching Process to Promote "Outcomes"

Toward teaching process, the teaching content and teaching means must be highly viscous with the "learning results" to ensure that high-quality teaching activities run through the whole process of talent training.

First, faculty must correctly understand the term "learning achievements" in OBE. As an ESP major, the cultivation of English language ability and business ability cannot be completely separated, but must be organically integrated. Therefore, components of teaching process such as the curriculum design, textbook selection and teaching mode must reflect the combination of academic needs and skill needs. Take the graduation thesis (Design) as an example. Students should be encouraged to jump out of the circle of academic paper writing and make more attempts in other forms, such as reports by enterprise research, entrepreneurship project design and business plans. The transformation can help students really use their knowledge in language and business they have learned to uncover phenomena and problems in professional fields and put forward their own views and solutions, which is also a great satisfaction for students' current situational needs and will lay a good foundation for the realization of the needs of the target scenario.

Secondly, innovative methods must be put into teaching. Faculty need to break the traditional methodology and improve their competence in computer and Internet to enhance the integration of professional teaching and modern information means. At present, a group of teachers in Business English specialty are applying a hybrid of online and offline teaching to carry out exploratory teaching and cooperative teaching. With this innovative methods students are given sufficient space to improve their language application ability, speculative ability and digital literacy, the result of which is really centered on students' and enterprises' needs.

3.2 Focus On Faculty Transformation to Promote Their Leading Role

Towards faculty construction, it is high time that all members turned their profession as language teachers alone to roles of a combination of language and business skills.

In 2014, the State Council of People's Republic of China proposed to guide a number of ordinary undergraduate colleges and universities to transform to application-oriented colleges and universities. The 2016 Chinese government work report clearly proposed to "promote the very transformation of qualified ordinary undergraduate colleges and universities". According to Jane Battistini [6], there is no doubt that faculty transformation is the foundation. National policies, including the *Outline of the National Plan of Medium – and- Long-Term Education Reform and Development* (2010-2020), *the Decision of the State Council on Accelerating the Development of Modern Vocational Education*, and *The Proposals on Guiding Some Local Ordinary Undergraduate Colleges and Universities to Conduct Application-Oriented Transform*, clearly require the construction of faculty with dual qualifications and dual abilities.

In the field of Business English specialty, it is prominent that the majority of faculty are majored in language teaching and study, so a two pronged approach must be taken. First, professional teachers, as the foundation and core of faculty, must speed up their own transformation. Here a misunderstanding must be corrected that transformation does not just require teachers to be lecturers and technicians or make textual research and obtain certificates. Instead, teachers must be able to accomplish their teaching in a synthetic way whose components are English, cross-cultural communication and business skills. In other words, teachers should portrait themselves with business image. In this situation, teachers should "internship" themselves to acquire the ongoing changes in social needs through training, enterprise research and post taking, and internalize the needs into curriculum objectives. In this way, language teaching and business skills teaching can be integrated so as to avoid producing the gap between academic content and technical drilling, which will hinder the development of students' ability of cross-cultural communication and competence at international business affairs.

Second, outstanding experts are the supplementary teachers for the courses which are highly professional such as Drilling of Electronic Cross-border Commerce. Furthermore, elites from enterprises can also play a catalytic role in the transformation of good-at-language teachers. Collaborative education supported by industry and enterprises could offer numerous experts in various business fields into classroom teaching, online or offline, to promote professional competence. Through replacement

and implantation of professional courses such as Business Etiquette, Electronic Commerce, Business Translation, students have access to first-hand and direct experience and knowledge. Take what has been conducted in Hunan University of Arts and Science as an example. Experts are asked to fulfill their teaching with a project ongoing in his own team and students are his interns. There are two parts in his teaching, one being the theoretical introduction and the other one being to put it into practice of the project. Students are not only awarded with credits but also payment. Plus, completely differentiated methods, covering encouragement, collaboration and assessment, are always applied to cultivate students' comprehensive competence. All of these new methods build a highly copy of workplace atmosphere. Apart from professional courses, others such as competition and internships also need these talents' participation.

3.3 Focus on Teaching Conditions to Promote the Learning of Practical Skills

Towards the improvement of conditions in teaching and learning, much attention should be paid to two important requirements, one being the virtual teaching platforms and the other one being the base located in enterprises related to the specialty. It has been proved that both language ability and business ability are the learning achievements that employers and students attach importance to, so schools should strengthen practical teaching in many ways for the two needs. Hence virtual teaching platforms are productive parts of teaching facilities. These platforms feature with amounts of cases from business context, by which students can first consolidate what they have acquired in language learning and business knowledge and then improve their ESP competence in correspondence, documents, business negotiation, cross-border e-commerce, cross-cultural communication, business etiquette, business communication, etc. It is helpful for teachers to save time to modify what students have done instead of collecting cases.

As for the base construction located in enterprises, monotonicity of electronic commerce, either B2B or B2C, must be let out by extending to other fields such as business translation, international reception and management. Another suggestion is that medium-sized companies or ones larger than them earn the priority to be base for students, for that students can obtain more resources and opportunities in team management, training, personal responsibility and professionalism.

3.4 Focus on Assessment Methods to Promote Sustainable Teaching

Towards assessment, it is urgent to enrich access and make continuous improvement. The evaluation principle of learning achievements must firmly clings to three factors, namely, "talent training objectives" mentioned in *Guidelines*, social needs and students' personal needs. Whether students have achieved the objectives and met the very needs are the hard criteria for testing learning achievements, so internal and external evaluation must be carried out simultaneously.

Internal evaluation is mainly to examine the achievement degree of learning achievements. On the one hand, teachers must get rid of the simple evaluation means of homework, classroom performance, attendance and traditionally theoretical examination and turn to actively use information-technology-based means, such as sound, image and Internet. Both theoretical knowledge and cases edited from real context constitute a valid paper to test students' learning results. Additionally, the language output and problem-solving skills could be assessed in several ways such as information research, project presentation with team work, project writing, etc. On the other hand, it is advisable that teachers take various measures to collect students' needs before conducting their work and check whether students have realized their needs in respects of scale and depth after learning. With the contrast analysis, teachers can figure out the problems and solutions so as to achieve continuous improvement.

External evaluation is mainly to examine the transformation of learning achievements. Employers, graduates and parents are important sources of information feedback. Therefore, schools must establish a complete quality tracking and investigation system with aid of information-based means. Regular surveys of graduates and employers can be produced to collect the matching degree of students' learning achievements with their industries and positions to check whether the learning achievements in schools can be smoothly transformed into practical skills and improve job competence.

In addition, internal evaluation and external evaluation are organically linked. Strict and effective internal evaluation can ensure the gradual rise of external evaluation, and the problems found in external evaluation can promote the reform of internal evaluation.

Conclusion

The study brings light to two aspects. As a specialty of ESP, Business English has made its own existence for 15 years in China to meet national need for economic development. Therefore it is the first that the study interprets what and why the outcomes of OBE are in Business English teaching in this way that the outcomes must be defined as students' strong language competence and practical capabilities based on social needs and personal needs. For the both of needs, more attention is traditionally given to the former but less to the latter, which this study instead asks for equal attention. The second significance of the study lies in the China's current situation of Business English teaching that it is necessary to adhere to *Guideline* [1] and *National Criteria* [2] to improve teaching quality in four aspects which are about teaching process, faculty, facilities and assessment comprehensively. Compared with other studies, this study makes its analysis integrated "four points" of OBE concept and provides suggestions based on *Guideline* [1] and *National Criteria* [2] to realize the target of talent cultivation

and assure the continuous support particularly for Belt and Road. However, the quantitative research on subjects such as faculty's competence and further analysis on effective assessment must be supplemented in later study.

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