

# A Blended Exploration of College English Teaching Mode Reform Guided with OBE Concept

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**Abstract:** College English teaching is encountering a major challenge: a mismatch between course teaching and undergraduate program requirements in China. To tackle this issue, lecturers have been exploring different teaching strategies and modes. Guided with Outcome-Based Education (OBE) concept, this study proposes a systematic blended teaching mode to address the aforementioned problem on a basis of Comprehensive College English I and II course teaching in a private university in China. Students are divided into experimental classes and control classes. Throughout the process of teaching reform, a combination of online and offline activities are implemented. Upon completion of one year of reform, a comparative study of the course outcomes between the experimental and control classes will be conducted using SPSS statistical software. The analysis revealed that the OBE-based blended teaching approach improved students' professional skills and language ability. This study aims to help college English lecturers in China understand and implement a new teaching model that aligns with undergraduate program requirements and improves students' abilities.

**Keywords:** college English teaching mode reform, OBE Concept, blended teaching mode

## 1. Introduction

College English plays a significant role in the curriculum of English-related majors, as it lays the foundation for more advanced and comprehensive courses during their undergraduate program. Meanwhile, the rapid development of technology and society, there has been a shift in the demands for social and economic development, which has impacted College English teaching. Currently, the major challenge for college English teaching lies in a mismatch between course teaching and requirements in undergraduate programs.

This study aims to reform college English education with the Outcome-based Education (OBE) concept, which prioritizes learning outcomes and achievements. OBE involves establishing clear student outcomes and aligning curriculum, instruction, and assessment to achieve those outcomes. Despite criticism, OBE remains a popular approach in various fields such as accounting programs [9], educational informatization [2], art education [8], autonomous learning ability cultivation [3] and nursing[6] [7] [10]. Harden et al. (1999) sought to investigate the effectiveness of OBE approaches. The purpose of this research is to find the best available empirical evidence to investigate the effectiveness of OBE approaches on the competencies of translation-majored students.

Many present-day students seek an education that not only imparts theoretical knowledge but also equips them with the professional skills for their future jobs [10]. One of the “New Realities” of higher education is the crucial link between employers and higher education institutions [5]. How can we address the challenges of modern tertiary education? One possible solution is to implement the Outcome-Based Education (OBE) approach, which can be particularly effective for undergraduate students studying English-related programs. OBE is a powerful and innovative tool for reorganizing and improving English education, as well as for other disciplines.

In contemporary education, the implementation of Outcome-based education (OBE) holds significant importance. This approach emphasizes measurable student achievements and prioritizes the progress and performance of the students, making it a truly student-centered approach[1].

## **2. Background and problem statement**

University students go through significant changes in their learning environment and methods during their freshman year. They encounter challenges, experience influences, and devise strategies [4]. Clark [4] revealed that challenges and influences ranged from negative to positive, and occurred both inside and outside the institution. As a result, having a good beginning is of great significance to freshmen to prepare them for university study and life. To have an overall idea about the learning objectives and different learning stage tasks and some useful learning skills are very constructive to them. For first-year undergraduate translation majors, “Comprehensive College English” is a crucial course that may not only boost their language proficiency but also may improve their self-learning, self-management, and communication skills, so as to prepare them for future study.

However, many “Comprehensive College English” lecturers concentrate only on knowledge acquisition and fail to develop students’ professional abilities and self-learning abilities. Comprehensive English for translation and interpretation majors faces a similar issue, with some classroom activities only targeting language skills and failing to improve professional, critical thinking, and communication abilities.

However, students’ abilities, knowledge, and achievements are essential for their future development and possible career. As a result, curriculum reform is urgently needed to address these shortcomings.

## **3. Method**

This study is based on an empirical research conducted on the course teaching of Comprehensive College English I and II , with the participation of 121 translation and interpretation undergraduates from a private university in China. The teaching mode used was a blended approach that included both online activities and classroom activities, which can be divided into three parts: pre-class activities (both online and offline), student-centered classroom activities (both online and offline), and after-class activities using online learning platforms and technology, all of which were practiced in five different aspects, which

include:1) Combining online and offline course teaching, 2) vocabulary learning habit cultivation, 3) Lexile English reading, 4) English and translation-related competitions, 5) learning outcome evaluations reform. After two semesters of implementing this new teaching mode, the course outcomes of the experimental and control classes were compared using SPSS statistical software.

In summary, this teaching reform seeks to revolutionize the traditional teaching methods that focus solely on vocabulary, grammar, and text. It is closely aligned with the undergraduate program requirements and emphasizes the development of students' skills, particularly in their ability to use English and Chinese languages, learn independently, think critically, and work collaboratively with others.

**Table 1.** Five reform activities, their contents, and related undergraduate program aims

No.	Activity name	Phase	Related Undergraduate Program Aims	Content
1	Combining online and offline course teaching	student-centered classroom activities	3. Capability requirements	Classroom teaching and online teaching
2	vocabulary learning habit cultivation	pre-class activities	3. Capability requirements	clock-in system of oral English practicing and CET-4 vocabulary learning.
3	Lexile English reading	after-class activities with online learning platforms and technology	2. Knowledge requirements	3 effective Lexile English article reading and related questions
4	English-and-translation-related competitions	after-class activities	1 Attainment requirement	Uchallenge English Writing Contest Uchallenge English Reading Contest CATI Translation Contest
5	learning outcome evaluation reform	after-class activities	1 Attainment requirement	Various ways to assess students' learning outcome

As shown in Table 1, five kinds of activities were designed to be important part of the teaching form. They are practiced at different phases in the teaching process: pre-class activities, classroom activities or after-class activities. In the column "Undergraduate Program Aim", the targeted undergraduate program aim were listed, which shows the direct designing purpose of the activity. Column "Content" is very important here, it details the specific ways on how to practice the activity, including the planned platform, managing way, etc.

#### Experiment

##### Population

This research selects 121 undergraduates of 5 classes of Translation and Interpretation School in a private college in Xi'an, China to conduct a comparative study. The five existing classes were divided into two groups, with Class 3 and Class 4 as experimental classes, and the remaining three as control classes. The experimental classes adopt teaching reform in the

above five aspects based on OBE education concept, while the control classes remain traditional English teaching methods.

#### Experimental Research Design

Before teaching practice, OBE relevant research materials and practice cases were collected and studied carefully, especially in the case of college English teaching. Secondly, a comprehensive teaching reform design is created with the guidance of Undergraduate Program in Translation and Interpretation at my school.

Initially, when students are in the first month as a freshman in their university, a preliminary test will be conducted as the first round of data collection and the basic data to have a comparative study in the future. Secondly, five aspects are set to undergo reform when teaching Comprehensive English I and II as previously mentioned in method. Thirdly, experimental and control classes were decided. Thirdly, some details, like the number of focus exercises and lectures, are discussed, and it comes to course material selection and preparation. In the end, after two semesters of teaching reform, an SPSS statistical analysis is used to show students' learning outcomes after applying OBE philosophy in a comparative way.

## 4. Findings and discussion

Data source: Data in this research can be divided into two parts: The first part comes from scores in the semester examinations of Comprehensive English I and Comprehensive English II. The question structure and score distribution of the two examinations are completely consistent. The difficulty of the tests is basically the same, only with the reading comprehension part slightly more difficult. The other part of the data comes from the test scores of different test parts of the three staged tests (test parts include: translation, close, writing, listening, reading comprehension, etc.) The question structure and score distribution of the four staged tests are completely consistent. Like semester examinations, the difficulty of the staged tests is basically the same, only with the reading comprehension part slightly more difficult.

### 4.1 Comparison of scores in semester examinations of the experimental class and the control class

**Table 2.** Group statistics of scores in semester examinations of Comprehensive English I and Comprehensive English II

Group statistics					
	Group name	<i>N</i>	mean	S.D.	S.D. error mean
Examination of Comprehensive English I	Control classes	74	54.49	9.524	1.107
	experimental classes	44	61.38	8.245	1.243
Examination of Comprehensive English II	Control classes	77	58.87	7.969	.908
	experimental classes	44	67.23	9.645	1.454

Table 2 shows the group statistic results of two semester examinations: Examination of Comprehensive English I and Examination of Comprehensive English II. It shows the comparative result of control classes and experiment classes. *N* refers to the number of each group. Mean in the fourth column is the average score of students in control classes and experimental classes. S.D. is the Standard Deviation.

Analysis: Based on the data in the table above, it is evident that the experimental class had average scores of 61.38 and 67.23 for their two final grades respectively, while the control class had final exam grades of 54.49 and 58.87 for the two semesters. The experimental class had a higher increase of 5.85 points in their average score compared to the control class's increase of 4.38 points. This indicates that the outcome-based teaching reform experiments conducted in the experimental class for a semester resulted in significant improvements in their grades from their initial levels.

After completing two semesters of reforming practice, the students in the control classes demonstrated significant improvement in various areas, such as public speaking, critical thinking, and information searching skills. The data indicates that they performed better on their semester exams and achieved higher scores on the CET 4 test, a national English level test for college students in the People's Republic of China. It is worth noting that nearly all students in the control classes passed this national English level test. Furthermore, these students excelled in the CATTI (China Accreditation Test for Translators and Interpreters) translation contest, winning more and higher prizes. This serves as a testament to their English proficiency and professional capabilities.

Analysis II: analysis of scores of different parts in preliminary and staged tests

This section will analyze and discuss data from preliminary and staged tests in two semesters, focusing on the outcomes of a blended teaching reform based on OBE. Data will be collected from four separate tests conducted during the OBE-based teaching reform: one preliminary test shortly after students' enrollment in their first semester, and three staged tests during the two semesters. The scores from each part of these tests (listening, reading, cloze, translation, and writing) will be analyzed to provide a definitive outcome. We chose translation part to show the outcome of this teaching reform.

#### 4.2 Translation part analysis

**Table 3.** Description of scores of translation part in the preliminary test and Staged test 3.

Description								
preliminary test: translation part								
	N	mean	S.D.	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval		Min.	Max.
					lower limit	upper limit		
1	26	8.58	3.202	.628	7.28	9.87	0	14
2	25	7.08	1.935	.387	6.28	7.88	1	9
3	23	9.48	2.574	.537	8.37	10.59	0	13
4	21	8.43	2.336	.510	7.37	9.49	2	14
5	26	6.38	1.768	.347	5.67	7.10	0	9
Sum	121	7.94	2.631	.239	7.47	8.42	0	14

Description

Staged test 3: translation part								
	N	mean	S.D.	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval		Min.	Max.
					lower limit	upper limit		
1	26	11.46	1.902	.373	10.69	12.23	7	14
2	24	10.25	2.172	.443	9.33	11.17	3	13
3	23	10.74	1.936	.404	9.90	11.58	7	14
4	21	10.86	2.613	.570	9.67	12.05	2	14
5	24	8.25	3.948	.806	6.58	9.92	0	14
Sum	118	10.31	2.809	.259	9.80	10.83	0	14

Presented is a comparison table for the grades of two translation exams: the preliminary exam and the third staged exam. The left column denotes the class number, with the letter "N" indicating the number of students in each class. The "mean" column displays the average score of each class in the translation segment of the exam, while "Min" reflects the lowest score and "Max" the highest score in the translation segment of each class.

The table indicates a clear improvement in the average score of each class from the preliminary exam in the first semester to the third staged test in the second semester. All classes have demonstrated an increase in their average scores, from 7.94 to 10.31, a significant rise of 2.37 points. Additionally, the statistical results reveal that both the lowest and the highest scores of each class have also improved.

## 5. Conclusion

The average score of "Comprehensive English" increased across the whole grade, and the experimental class saw a larger increase of 5.85 points. We have analyzed students' grades in two semester exams of Comprehensive English I and Comprehensive English II and grades of the listening part, reading part, close part, translation part, and writing part. The results show a significant improvement in students' writing, listening, cloze, and translation, affirming the crucial role of the five teaching reform activities in this accomplishment. The students have also benefited from the online and offline blended learning mode and enhanced their various abilities. The course teaching reform closely aligns with the requirements of the undergraduate program, providing students with opportunities to improve their language skills, understand and promote China's traditional culture, and develop critical thinking and communication skills.

However, the study was limited to only two semesters. For future study, more rounds of teaching practices would be necessary to accumulate practical teaching experience of the OBE teaching concept and offer valuable insights for college English teaching reform.

**Acknowledgments.** This research was funded by Xi'an Fanyi University Teaching Reform program, grant number J21A04, and Xi'an Fanyi University Nationally First-class Major Teaching Reform programs, grant number GFJ21A03 and GFJ21B06, and by The Youth Innovation Team of Shaanxi Universities in 2022: *Translation and International Communication of Fine Traditional Chinese Culture*.

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