

Research on the Curriculum of Foreign Language Courses in Universities based on OBE Education Model

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Abstract

Due to the sudden outbreak of the new coronavirus, universities are unable to open normally, and in order to do a good job of stopping classes without stopping school, the foreign language courses in universities can no longer be conducted in the traditional teaching mode and curriculum, and need to follow the trend of information technology, follow the concept of result-oriented education mode, put students as the centre of teaching, and the curriculum should also be centered on students, to meet the development and learning needs of students.

Keywords

University Foreign Languages; OBE Concept; Curriculum.

1. Introduction

At the end of January 2020, the Ministry of Education (MOE) made a general plan to "stop teaching and learning without stopping classes", and education departments and universities around the country responded positively to the MOE's call to quickly In response to the call of the Ministry of Education, education departments and universities all over the world quickly launched and popularized cloud-based classrooms, created online courses or selected catechism resources, used teaching platforms, conference platforms, social platforms and live streaming platforms to build air classes, and quickly shifted from the traditional face-to-face physical classroom teaching organization form to the information-based air classroom teaching form, which ensured the smooth implementation of teaching in the spring semester of 2020. Objectively, the epidemic accelerated the evolution of the public foreign language teaching model and tested the results of the "Internet + education" construction. The public foreign language courses were conducted on multiple platforms, with the most "teaching platform + meeting platform", which provided an in-depth experience of the convenience and efficiency of online teaching. The implementation of a comprehensive online course has enabled local universities to use various catechism resources on a large scale, breaking through physical space limitations and unlocking a large number of high-quality teaching resources, which is conducive, firstly, to the improvement of the knowledge and teaching ability of public foreign language teachers in local universities and, secondly, to meeting the needs of students for personalised development and excellent teaching resources, thus promoting a spatial change in the teaching paradigm.

In the context of the epidemic, the large-scale implementation of online classes has given a strong external impetus to the reform of public foreign language teaching in local undergraduate universities. The serious problem that public foreign languages have to introspect is that, in the post-epidemic era, it is impossible for public foreign language classes to continue the traditional curriculum and teaching mode of the past, and they will step into, and in fact have already started, the integration of comprehensive online and offline teaching.

The new era of "two-line hybrid teaching" has begun. [1] According to the survey, students believe that the achievement of the objectives of online classes is even higher than that of traditional classroom learning. [2] In the post-epidemic era, public foreign language teachers must get out of their comfort zone, change the dualistic structure of active teaching by teachers and passive learning by students, introduce the concept of Outcome Based Education (OBE), take students as the centre, follow the result orientation, reverse the design of teaching system and curriculum system, and promote the upgrading of public foreign language courses in local undergraduate universities in the post-epidemic era. The course will be upgraded to be "aware of changes, adaptable, and seeking changes", based on the big picture of talent training needs in the era of "Internet + education", and take up the new mission of "new liberal arts, big foreign languages". The course has been upgraded to a new level.

Developed by the Steering Committee for Teaching Foreign Languages in Colleges and Universities of the Ministry of Education, the Guide to Teaching College English has become a programmatic document for public foreign language teaching and reform in colleges and universities since its release in 2017. The Guide clearly states that "College English courses are part of humanities education in higher education and have both instrumental and humanistic nature." [3] The instrumental nature of university English requires that university English teaching should enable students to master this language tool, be able to draw on the cutting-edge information of their major, be able to participate effectively in international exchanges, be able to read the English literature of their major, and be able to meet the requirements of society for the foreign language ability of professionals. The Guide to Teaching English in Universities suggests that universities should teach public foreign languages according to the orientation of each university and the talent training objectives of different majors, and with reference to the requirements for students' foreign language skills according to the national standards for the quality of teaching in different majors. In the information era of globalization, foreign language tools are especially important for local general colleges and universities, which are based in local areas and are positioned for the cultivation and output of composite application-oriented talents. Public foreign language teaching in colleges and universities should enhance students' communicative competence in English and disciplinary thinking in scientific literacy and professional fields, so that students can use English effectively in their respective professional studies and future work, in line with the needs of the state, society, schools and personal development. The objectives of public foreign language teaching proposed in the Guide to Teaching English in Universities follow a tiered classification, leaving the authority to set the objectives of public foreign language courses to individual universities. Local universities set public foreign language teaching objectives that meet the needs of students' professional studies and future career requirements according to their own orientation and talent training objectives.

The OBE (outcome-based education) education model first emerged in the field of basic education reform in the United States and Australia, and was first proposed by Spady et al. in North America [4]. In the late 20th century, the OBE model became prevalent in the US education sector, and has since gradually developed into a well-established theoretical system. The model is an outcome-based approach to education. The model is an outcome-oriented and structured model that organises, implements and evaluates education with a focus on the expected "learning outputs" [5]. It advocates the concept of "student-centred" development, pays great attention to the realistic needs of society for talents, focuses on the learning output, arranges teaching time and selects and designs important teaching resources in a scientific and reasonable manner [6]. The teaching objectives of the curriculum support the achievement of the training objectives and graduation requirements. The unreasonable curriculum setting inevitably leads to many courses not playing their proper supporting role in the process of realizing the cultivation objectives and graduation requirements [7]. English majors in colleges

and universities can refer to the OBE education model, take competence training as the core, take "learning output" as the goal, adhere to the student-centered, student learning as the centre, focus on not only the overall development of students, but also focus on students' career development, build a modular curriculum with competence training as the main line, and form a modular curriculum system for this major [8].

2. Current Situation of Teaching Public Foreign Language Courses

Public foreign language courses are instrumental, humanistic and scientific in nature and need to be realized through foreign language teaching. Traditional foreign language teaching is centred on the teacher and the textbook, and the classroom is the only place for practice. The teacher focuses on explaining the usage of vocabulary and phrases, analysing the grammatical structure of sentences, analysing the framework structure of reading texts, and repeatedly practising after-class exercises. This type of teaching, based on the behaviourist theory of teaching, is still commonly used today and has irreplaceable advantages. In the face-to-face interactive teaching process, feedback can be given in a timely manner, and teachers are informed of the effectiveness of the teaching by the students' real-time responses. However, there are still some general problems with public foreign language teaching in China. The most prominent problem is the limited number of foreign language teachers, and the fact that public foreign languages are generally taught in large/combined classes with a large number of students, so that students' foreign language levels vary significantly, it is difficult for foreign language teachers to take care of students' personal development and individual needs in the teaching process. As a result, the students' satisfaction with public foreign language courses is low. In the 70th anniversary of the founding of New China and especially in the 40 years of reform and opening up, foreign language education in China's universities has always taken helping students to build a solid language foundation as the main conflict. [9] The orientation of university English courses with the teaching goal of building a solid language foundation has always failed to meet society's demand for college students' foreign language ability, as well as the needs of students' professional learning, English literature reading and international exchange.

At present, most local colleges and universities in China mainly follow the traditional English curriculum, and generally use large publishers' textbooks such as Shanghai Foreign Language Education Publishing House's All New Edition of College English, Foreign Language Teaching and Research Publishing House's New Horizons College English, and Higher Education Publishing House's 21st Century College English, etc. These textbooks generally have supporting online course resources, providing online lesson plans, study plans, exercises. These textbooks are generally accompanied by online course resources, providing online lesson plans, study plans, exercises, and test banks. The main objective of these textbooks is to guide students to study the text in depth and to practise language skills such as listening, reading, writing and translating from the perspective of words, sentences and articles, with a preference for developing students' English language skills. According to a survey on the composition of the public foreign language courses in nine local universities in XX province, it is found that the public foreign language courses in these nine universities mainly or only refer to university English, and mainly use several sets of university English textbooks that are commonly used in China now. Five universities offer the first four semesters of university English, three schools offer three semesters, and one university offers five semesters. The number of weeks offered varies from 12 to 18, with slight variations from semester to semester, and the number of credits ranges from 10 to 16. Overall, more credit hours means more credits, and more credit hours means higher chances of offering follow-up courses, with four colleges offering more than 200 total credit hours, and three of these four colleges offering follow-up courses in the third

and subsequent semesters. According to the survey, these follow-up courses are mainly English for Police Purposes, English for Law, English for Finance and Economics, English for Business, English for Tourism and other special purposes, i.e. ESP; as well as Second Foreign Language, English Speech, Western Culture, English Newspaper Reading, Chinese Culture Translation, Belt and Road Countries, Appreciation of English and American Literature, Audiovisual Speaking, Intensive Level 4-6, Speech and Debate, IELTS, TOEFL, etc. Follow-up courses are generally offered for 1-2 credit hours per week, and the number of weeks offered is generally 10-14 weeks.

As can be seen from the above, first of all, the compulsory public foreign language courses in local universities emphasize the teaching of language ability and language skills training, the teaching materials are conservative and the teaching methods are traditional, mainly computer-assisted teaching and internet-assisted teaching. Secondly, the nature of the courses is mainly compulsory for general education, focusing on language knowledge teaching and humanities, and failing to give full play to the instrumental nature of public foreign languages to promote professional learning and academic communication, and failing to serve the needs of students for professional learning and further study. Thirdly, the length and weight of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and English for Academic Purposes (EAP) are clearly not sufficient, and the public foreign language courses lack continuity. There is a lack of continuity in public foreign language courses, with no foreign language courses being offered until basically the fifth semester. Fourthly, the only public foreign language course offered in the eight universities is University English, with only one university offering a second foreign language option in a subsequent course.

3. A Three-dimensional Curriculum System for Public Foreign Languages based on the OBE Concept

The Guidelines for Teaching English at University require that the content of public foreign language courses should cover general English, English for Special Purposes and intercultural communication. In addition, public foreign language courses can be divided into compulsory courses, limited elective courses and any elective courses, and the course cycle can be extended so that public foreign language courses can be offered continuously during the four years of students' study in university, so as to promote the progression of students' foreign language ability. Based on the level of education, the development needs of students and the needs of society, local universities should first clarify their training objectives, and then develop and design public foreign language courses under the guidance of the output-oriented concept by specifying the educational output into quantitative descriptions of the competencies that can be tested according to the educational standards to be achieved. This is the practical expression of the reverse design principle of the OBE concept. The Guide to Teaching English in Universities states that university English courses should follow the rules of language teaching and learning, reasonably arrange teaching content and class time, take into account differences in majors and students' basic differences, and ensure that students' English language proficiency steadily improves during their studies while facilitating the individual learning needs of students of different majors. [3] The system of public foreign language courses in local universities should be divided into three levels based on output orientation in accordance with the Guidelines for Teaching English in Universities and according to students' baseline language level, professional needs and future career needs. It is a three-tier public foreign language curriculum system based on the OBE concept constructed by studying the employment destinations of students in local undergraduate colleges and universities, the objectives of talent training and the orientation of local undergraduate colleges and universities. The course objectives of the graded course clusters are identified with different focuses depending on

students' academic and vocational needs. The structure of the whole curriculum system is based on the identification of course objectives and the definition of the nature of the course, which ultimately reflects the nurturing nature of public foreign language courses in the training of talents. The first level is a basic course in foreign language knowledge, which aims at building a solid language foundation and training language skills in listening, reading, writing and translating. The second level is a humanities education course, namely English for General Purposes (EGP). Humanities English should emphasise the teaching of culture and literature and the development of critical thinking and cross-cultural communication skills. The third level is English for Special Purposes (ESP), which includes English for Academic Purposes (EAP), English for Professional Purposes (EPP) and English for Occupational Purposes (EOP), a scientific literacy programme that meets students' professional learning needs, future career needs and academic literacy needs for further study.

3.1. Basic Language Courses at Level 1

Students in local universities generally have a weak foundation in foreign languages, so the individual needs of students are first and foremost to consolidate their language foundation and improve their English listening, reading, writing and translation skills. The teaching objectives that focus on language knowledge acquisition and skills training are the learning outcome outputs that need to be benchmarked for Level 1 foundation courses. Level 1 courses are taught primarily using behaviourist learning theory, where the formation of students' language knowledge and their level of language skills can be assessed in detail against targets. Teaching is usually in the form of progressive, progressive and repetitive training. Level 1 courses are mainly general education courses, such as a comprehensive university English course, university English vocabulary, English grammar, English writing, foreign language audio-visual, a second foreign language, and English speech and debate. Many students at this stage attach great importance to the Level 4 and 6 examinations, so it may be worthwhile to offer tutorials for the corresponding levels. The language skills required of students vary from one employer to another, with those entering the workforce at tutorial institutions requiring better listening and speaking skills, and those entering the workforce in factories and mines requiring the ability to complete reading of general English materials and simple conversational skills. Of course, the underlying reason for the importance that students generally attach to University English Level 4 and 6 is the general social recognition of the University English Level 4 and 6 exam certificates.

3.2. Secondary Humanities Courses

The second level course cluster is called the quality education course cluster, which emphasises the role of humanities education in the curriculum, that is, to cultivate students with certain foreign language skills as well as humanistic sentiments. Courses in British and American history, British and American culture, European culture, British and American literature, and selected readings from Western newspapers are offered to nurture students' humanistic spirit and develop intercultural awareness and communicative competence. The development of intercultural competence is considered to be the task of foreign language courses, and public foreign language courses have been biased towards cultural input in the target language, to the detriment of developing students' ability to communicate Chinese culture in English. It is imperative to offer English courses in Chinese culture and some courses in local (indigenous) culture, for example: reading and translation of Chinese culture, Chinese poetry, and comparison of Chinese and Western cultures. It is recommended that teaching is based on socio-cultural theory using scaffolding and interactive teaching models, and that students should act fully to use language as a mediator to eventually develop cultural judgement and critical thinking skills.

3.3. Level 3 Science Literacy Courses

The Guide to Teaching English in Universities characterizes public foreign languages as a compulsory general education course in the humanities education category, but if it is designed according to humanities, the instrumental nature of public foreign languages will not be realized. The special conference on the reform of public foreign language teaching in colleges and universities held by the Ministry of Education in September 2018 proposed that public foreign language teaching in colleges and universities should be dedicated to cultivating both professional specialties and professional foreign language skills "international composite talents", so "public foreign languages must be positioned to serve students' professional learning, and both teaching and teaching materials should reflect their professionalism, and cultivate scientific and professional literacy in addition to humanistic literacy" [10]. Public foreign language courses in local universities are an integral part of professional education and should strive to serve students' professional learning needs and future career development needs. The third level of developmental courses in public foreign languages in local undergraduate universities aims to meet students' academic development and career development, mainly referring to the teaching of English for Special Purposes (ESP). The popular English for Academic Purposes (EAP), English for Professional Purposes (EPP) and English for Occupational Purposes (EO-P) are all ESPs. Specific courses vary according to the specialism, such as English for Business and Economics, English for Marketing, English for Medicine, English for Law, English for Aviation, English for Tourism, English for Academic Purposes, and Reading and Writing International Journal Papers. The three-tiered curriculum system creates a three-dimensional cluster of courses that can meet different language levels, different learning needs and different social demands. The General English course, consisting of a basic language course and a humanities course, is a solid foundation for public foreign language education, and the objectives of the courses are to develop students' language skills and intercultural communication skills. The English for Special Purposes course is designed to meet the needs of students in their professional studies and research, and to meet the requirements of students' professional foreign language skills after graduation, as well as to lay the foundations of reading and writing scientific and technical literature for students pursuing further studies. The three-level curriculum follows the OBE concept, focuses on output-oriented teaching design, follows the "student-centred" foreign language education model, and integrates the instrumental, humanistic and scientific nature of public foreign language courses.

4. Conclusion

The sudden outbreak of the new crown epidemic in early 2020 changed the education ecology. The implementation of large-scale online courses during the epidemic could be considered a major exercise in education informatics. As the epidemic was largely prevented and universities around the world began to resume, teaching was about to return to campuses and classrooms, yet the post-epidemic era of teaching had only just begun, and teaching could not return to its pre-epidemic mode as it was; the reform of teaching informatics was bound to accelerate. The reform of public foreign language teaching at the national level has been opened from 2018. Public foreign language is based on the teaching principle of reverse design positive implementation of the OBE concept and the construction of a three-tier curriculum system, which ensures the satisfaction of different output needs and fully realizes the instrumental, humanistic and scientific role of public foreign language, in line with the curriculum positioning of public foreign language as an organic component of professional education. From the perspective of reform practice, local undergraduate universities need to further explore and practice the interactive teaching of the three-level three-dimensional curriculum system, to deeply integrate online course resources with school-based course resources, and to deeply

integrate the traditional teaching mode with the "Internet + education" mode, so that public foreign languages can assume the role of "new liberal arts and foreign languages" in the education information reform. The course is designed to integrate the traditional teaching mode and the "Internet + education" mode, so that public foreign languages can take up the mission of educating people in the era of "new liberal arts and foreign languages".

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