

Exploring the Feasibility and Educational Suggestions for Integrating OBE Educational Concepts into Higher Vocational English Courses

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Abstract. In response to the English curriculum standards of higher vocational colleges in both society and the nation, this study explores the feasibility of applying Outcome-Based Education (OBE) concepts into higher vocational English courses. A teaching experiment was conducted with 161 students selected from 4 parallel classes at a public higher vocational college in Guangdong Province. The intervention involved teachers in the experimental class utilizing the "Design Plan for the Application of OBE Educational Concepts in Hotel English Courses" provided by the researchers, while the control class proceeded with regular teaching methods. Following an 8-week intervention period, it was found that students in the experimental class demonstrated significantly higher academic performance compared to those in the control class, indicating the positive impact of integrating OBE educational concepts into higher vocational English courses. At the same time, researchers randomly selected 8 students for semi-structured interviews. The results of the interviews revealed that students in the experimental class responded positively and demonstrated recognition and acceptance of the OBE teaching method. Conclusion: The application of the OBE educational concept in higher vocational English courses is deemed feasible. As a result, the researchers have provided educational recommendations for English teachers in higher vocational schools, aiming to foster innovation and enhance educational quality in the field.

Keywords: OBE educational concept, higher vocational colleges, English courses.

1. Introduction

With rapid economic development, cross-border business and tourism activities are increasing daily. Consequently, there is a growing demand in society for skilled professionals with a high level of English proficiency across various industries. Students in higher vocational colleges, who typically prioritize employment, require practical skills that align with market needs. Schools and educators must therefore focus on nurturing applied talents that meet both societal and student employment requirements. In accordance with the "Higher Vocational Education Professional English Course Standards"[1] English courses in higher vocational colleges are structured into basic and expansion modules. The content and emphasis of the expansion modules vary across different majors, but the overarching goal remains the development of students' future job skills, professional communication in English, and adaptability to English-speaking work environments. The OBE concept, which is outcome-driven and skill-focused, emphasizes practicality and values. This concept aligns well with the current English course teaching model in higher vocational colleges, making it a fitting theoretical framework for this study.

2. Literature Review

The Outcome-Based Education (OBE) was proposed by American scholar Spady. In his book *Outcome-Based Education: Critical Issues and Answers*, Spady defined the connotation of the OBE education concept as "a system that clearly focuses and organizes education to ensure that students gain substantial success in their future lives." This education concept is also known as outcome-oriented or goal-oriented education, which uses a reverse thinking approach to build a curriculum system[2]. The OBE education concept emphasizes "student-centeredness". It focuses

on the learning outcomes achieved by students and designs teaching content based on learning outcomes. Schools and teachers need to develop appropriate teaching strategies based on the actual situation of students to help students better master knowledge and skills.

Foreign research on OBE education concept was relatively systematic and complete, and can be traced back to the 1980s. Based on Spady's work, Harden proposed 12 unique advantages of OBE education concepts compared with traditional teaching methods[3]. Kennedy studied OBE education concepts from the perspective of the relationship between policy, theory and practice. He believed that these three factors influence each other and work together to implement outcome-oriented education[4]. Some European scholars studied OBE education concepts from the perspective of curriculum development models, such as dynamic environment curriculum planning. The training goal is to improve learning outcomes and cultivate qualified graduates[5]. In terms of actual teaching, a study investigated the prospects of implementing OBE in English as a second language learning courses for chemical engineering students. The experimental results showed that students' course learning outcomes in terms of content and skills were improved[6]. In summary, there are few studies abroad that combine OBE education concepts with English courses in higher vocational colleges.

Chinese scholars' research on combining OBE education concept with English courses mainly focused on the construction of teaching model, teaching reform or the combination with flipped classroom. In terms of the construction of teaching model, some studies have comprehensively constructed the teaching model of business English undergraduate classroom from the aspects of classroom teaching objectives, teaching organization, teaching evaluation, and continuous improvement[7]. Other studies have analyzed the current teaching model of college English oral courses and proposed effective measures to improve English oral courses based on the OBE concept [8]. Song analyzed the limitations of traditional English listening teaching and studied new paths for English listening teaching under the guidance of OBE concept[9]. In the direction of flipped classroom, some studies have found that combining OBE education concept with flipped classroom teaching model can improve students' English speaking performance and reduce learning anxiety [10].

In conclusion, the OBE educational concept offers new methods and ideas for educational innovation in various countries and professional education. However, existing research primarily focuses on undergraduate students, with limited studies examining students in higher vocational colleges. There are also fewer feasibility analyses of the OBE educational concept in higher vocational English courses, and most studies only stay at the surface level of theoretical discussion. Therefore, this study will take students from higher vocational colleges as the research subjects, apply the OBE educational concept to higher vocational English courses, use experimental methods to intervene in their learning process, and test the teaching effect through quantifiable data (academic performance) and semi-structured interviews, in order to explore the feasibility of applying the OBE educational concept to higher vocational English courses, and summarize the corresponding educational enlightenment, which will provide some reference value for the educational innovation methods and improvement of educational quality in higher vocational English courses.

3. Research Design

3.1 Research Subjects

This study selected 161 students from four hotel management majors in a public higher vocational college in Guangdong Province as the research subjects, with 161 valid subjects. The researchers conducted the experiment in the subjects' Hotel English course. Class 1 and 2 were experimental classes (using the OBE teaching concept), and class 3 and 4 were control classes (no intervention, normal teaching mode). The four classes selected in this study were parallel classes, and the students were roughly the same in age, intelligence level, academic performance, etc.

3.2 Research process

3.2.1 Teacher training

Before the experiment, the researcher provided a two-week training on the OBE educational concept for Teacher A of the experimental class. The researcher and Teacher A collaboratively reviewed the "Design Plan for the Application of OBE Educational Concepts in Hotel English Courses" to ensure Teacher A's understanding and mastery of the lesson plan's content and teaching process, facilitating the effective implementation of subsequent teaching activities. In contrast, Teacher B of the control class did not receive any intervention and continued teaching in a normal way.

3.2.2 Implementation of teaching

The experimental class students were taught in a teaching mode integrating OBE education concept with the "Hotel English" course for 8 weeks. During the research period, the experimental class teachers and the control class teachers could not communicate about the content related to the teaching activities to ensure the accuracy of the research results.

3.2.3 Data collection

After the first 4 weeks, the 4 classes were tested uniformly to obtain quantifiable data (academic performance in the first 4 weeks).

After the 8-week experiment, the 4 classes were tested uniformly to obtain quantifiable data (academic performance in the whole 8 weeks).

Through simple random sampling, 2 students were randomly selected from each class, a total of 8 students were interviewed semi-structured. The interview questions included students' perception of teachers' teaching methods, students' perception of changes in learning methods, and suggestions for problems in the teaching process of higher vocational English classes. After the researchers obtained the consent of the interviewees, they transcribed and coded the recordings and texts.

3.3 Data processing

After all the tests were completed, the academic scores were entered into Excel tables for analysis and comparison; the interview texts were entered into Nvivo12 for coding and visual analysis.

4. Results and Analysis

4.1 Analysis of Academic Performance

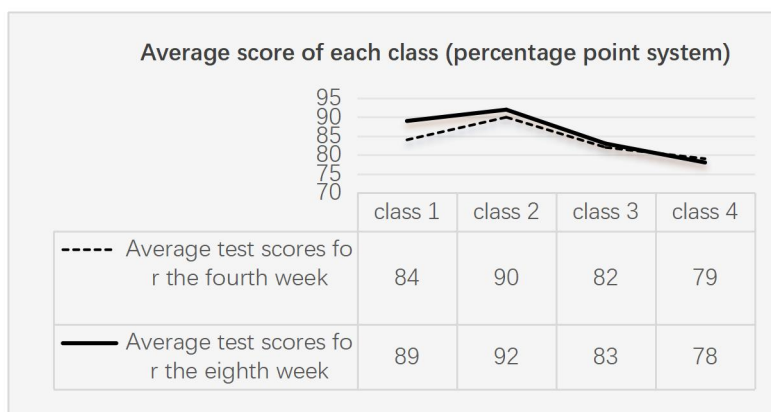


Fig. 1 Distribution of average scores of each class (percentage system)

From the test results of the first four weeks, it can be seen that after 4 weeks of intervention teaching, the average scores of students in the two experimental classes are higher than those in the control class. From the test results of the summative evaluation in the 8th week, it can be seen that the average scores of students in the two experimental classes are steadily rising, but the average scores of the control class are basically the same as in the first four weeks, and the average scores of the class 4 have decreased.

4.2 Semi-structured interview analysis

Table 1. Coding analysis of experimental class

Main category	Subcategory	Relationship connotation
Students' perception of teachers' teaching methods	Teachers respect individual differences	Meet the needs of different students
	Teachers fully mobilize students' enthusiasm and initiative	The classroom atmosphere is harmonious and students are willing to actively accept teachers
	Teachers attach importance to the cultivation of language practice ability	Create teaching scenarios and design language teaching activities
Students' perception of changes in learning methods	Students transform from passive acceptance to autonomous learning	In line with OBE's educational philosophy of "student-centered"
	Collaborative learning improves students' learning efficiency	Promote interaction and communication between students
	Inquiry-based learning is difficult	Examine students' critical thinking
Students' suggestions for higher vocational English classroom teaching	Evaluation methods need to be more diversified	Multi-dimensional and comprehensive assessment of students' academic achievements
	Control of teaching time in OBE classroom	Control of teaching time needs to be improved
	Integration of modern information technology and higher vocational English classroom	Improvement of information literacy

As shown in Table 1, after the integration of OBE education concept and experimental class English course, students have a positive attitude towards teachers' teaching methods. Students said that teachers pay more attention to students' individual differences in the 8-week course, and use classroom activities to fully mobilize students' enthusiasm, and create a language environment for students. Teachers pay more and more attention to the cultivation of language practice ability.

In terms of students' perception of changes in learning methods, students said that teachers provide them with many opportunities for cooperative learning and increase communication and interaction among classmates, but inquiry-based learning has certain difficulties and tests critical thinking and innovation ability. In terms of students' suggestions for classroom teaching, some students said that the evaluation methods under the OBE concept need to be diversified; teachers use media, the Internet, and artificial intelligence to make the classroom more colorful, but teachers do not control the teaching time well enough, and sometimes the class will be delayed.

In summary, the overall teaching feedback after integrating OBE education concept with experimental class English course is good.

Table 2 Coding analysis of the control class

Main category	Subcategory
Students' perception of teachers' teaching methods	The teaching method is basically the same as before
	The teaching method is mainly traditional teaching
Students' perception of changes in learning methods	Students mainly passively accept course content
	Group cooperative learning improves efficiency
Students' suggestions for higher vocational English classroom teaching	Innovative teaching methods
	Classroom atmosphere is not active enough
	Assessment method is too simple

As demonstrated in Table 2, it is evident that in the absence of any intervention, teachers and students in the control group reported a continuation of traditional teaching methods, with minimal changes. However, the implementation of group cooperative learning was found to enhance learning efficiency. The subjects expressed their desire for teachers to innovate their teaching methods, create a more engaging classroom atmosphere, and diversify assessment approaches.

In conclusion, feedback from students in the control group indicated a strong preference for teachers to adopt innovative teaching methods.

5. Discussion

The researchers integrated the implementation principles of the OBE educational concept: clear focus (the most important and basic principle), expanding opportunities (curriculum design and teaching should fully consider students' individual differences), raising expectations (teachers encourage students to learn deeply and promote more successful learning), and reverse design (teachers carry out teaching activities based on the final goal). After analyzing and comparing the academic performance and interview results of the four classes, the researchers found that the application of the OBE educational concept in English classes in higher vocational courses has a positive impact, which is consistent with the results of previous similar but different English major studies[12][13]. In the subsequent section, the researchers will integrate the implementation principles of the OBE concept with the insights gained from the semi-structured interview results, in order to provide recommendations on enhancing the quality of educational practices.

The clear focus principle of the OBE educational concept states that teachers need to be committed to helping students achieve expected results. For students in employment-oriented higher vocational colleges, it is crucial to improve workplace communication and language thinking skills. Therefore, teachers should design teaching activities that are suitable for students based on teaching objectives, comprehensively promote the improvement of students' core literacy in English subjects, and effectively promote the achievement of their academic goals.

The principle of expanding opportunities in the OBE educational philosophy underscores the significance of accommodating individual differences in curriculum design to ensure that all students have equal opportunities to achieve learning outcomes with adequate time and resources.

Therefore, teachers in higher vocational colleges should tailor their teaching methods to accommodate students' cognitive characteristics and proficiency levels, developing a teaching model that supports personalized and autonomous learning. It is crucial for teachers to offer guidance on students' learning methods and strategies. They can foster a conducive English learning environment by organizing diverse and engaging extracurricular activities, encouraging students to participate in various English skills competitions, and integrating these activities seamlessly into the English teaching curriculum.

The principle of increasing expectations in the OBE educational philosophy calls for setting high standards to motivate students to delve deeper into their learning. To align with the professional nature of higher vocational education, teachers can design language teaching activities that align with course objectives and the development of high-quality technical and skilled professionals. By enhancing students' language practice and application skills, teachers can deepen their understanding of professional responsibilities and mission.

6. Research Reflection and Prospect

This study was carried out in a public higher vocational college to assess the feasibility of integrating the OBE education concept in higher vocational English courses. The findings indicate that integrating the OBE education concept into higher vocational English courses positively impacts student learning. However, it is important to note that this study was limited to a single institution, had a small sample size, and encountered challenges related to students' acceptance,

learning abilities, teaching methodologies, and the transition of learning approaches. Furthermore, Teacher A was exposed to the OBE education concept for the first time, her control over the teaching time was not perfect, resulting in the phenomenon of delaying classes. Moreover, the study predominantly relied on academic performance as the assessment criterion, failing to incorporate multiple evaluation metrics in the assessment process. Future research endeavors should address these limitations and include a more comprehensive assessment framework to enhance the validity of the findings.

7. Conclusion

After applying the OBE education concept to higher vocational English courses, the scores of students in the experimental class showed an upward trend, which was significantly higher than that of the control class. Combined with the results of the semi-structured interview, it was concluded that the OBE education concept has a positive and active effect on higher vocational English courses.

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