

## *Original Paper*

# Teaching in Reading Circle under the OBE Mode—A Case Study

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### ***Abstract***

*Reading teaching is an integral part of college English teaching. Based on status quo analysis of college English reading teaching, this paper explores the application of OBE mode in college English reading teaching. Taking Unit 3 from College English III as an example, it first designs a unit teaching case from four aspects of definition, realization, evaluation, and application in the OBE chain. It then practices the above-mentioned OBE chain in the form of reading circle in the teaching class. The paper points out that college English reading teaching should adhere to the concept of being outcome-oriented and student-oriented. Reading teaching should also take into consideration students' creativity and lay focus on quality education.*

### ***Keywords***

*OBE mode, reading teaching, reading circle*

## **1. The Problem**

As an integral part of humanistic education in colleges and universities, the importance of college English courses is self-evident. Social development poses challenges for English language talents, which together with changes in students' needs have greatly promoted the reform in college English teaching nationwide. (Note 1) The university concerned in the current research officially began to implement college English teaching reform since the year 2016. In general, students who have met the requirements for English course exemption are entitled to either take the basic courses or to select College English IV selective courses, covering topics such as English comprehensive skills, cultural differences, bilingual teaching, etc. While those who fail to meet the course exemption qualification should continue the basic English course learning. The author's three classes (College English III) in the first semester last year belong to the latter type.

English reading comprehension seems to be a headache for many students since it is a complex and multi-dimensional cognitive process, which means in accomplishing the reading task, students need to integrate different cognitive skills (Dhanapala & Yamada, 2015). Taking into consideration students' language proficiency, in the reading teaching of the first unit, the author adopted a PWP teaching mode. The "while stage" was supposed to analyze students' questions/puzzles in text preview and theme extension. However, few students responded; the author then made some changes. That is, the author tried to propose text-related questions and invited students to provide answers. Still, there are few positive respondents; finally, the author chose a combination of word-by-word explanation and questions to complete the reading text and corresponding exercises. Reflection for reading teaching in the first unit is that on the one hand students' English knowledge and English proficiency is far from solid. The basic vocabulary and grammatical structures are not in place, the knowledge reserve is fragmented, and language knowledge is easily forgotten; on the other hand, some students are still poorly motivated for English learning. To change the status quo and better activate students, the author tried to innovate the existing reading teaching mode. Based on literature review and a preliminary questionnaire survey on students' expectations for reading learning and their difficulty in English reading, the author planned to practice reading circle method under the guidance of OBE mode.

## **2. OBE Mode and College English Teaching**

The OBE mode (therefore Outcome-based mode) first appeared in the United States in the 1980s. Spady in the definition of OBE, stated that the ultimate success of students determined what we focused on and how we organized things in an educational system (Spady, 1994). What students have learned bear more importance than how and when to learn (Wang, 2021). The practice of OBE mode therefore first requires a clear definition of expected learning outcome and then a retrospective design of teaching and evaluation with reference to the learning outcome. The OBE mode is therefore more student-oriented and learning-centered. It focuses on improvements in students' overall ability, emphasizing the observability, measurability and applicability of students' ability and therefore conforms to the actual needs of talents in external social environment (Chun, Guo, & Wang, 2021).

Teacher-researchers have tried to apply the OBE mode to college English teaching practice. For example, Lin (2021) based on the OBE-CDIO model and the OBE principles, integrated the L3 cognitive features of Zhuang ethnic group into language projects and probed into the application of OBE-CDIO model in College English teaching from dimensions of conceiving, designing, implementing, and operating. Cai and Li (2022) explored the integration of OBE mode into the evaluation system of college moral education in English classes. No doubt researches above lay foundation for the current study. However, English reading teaching practice under the OBE mode is still rarely discussed. College English reading teaching is more than an analysis of difficult phrases and patterns. It is the platform for students to think and act and the teacher should best play the role as a guide or facilitator. Therefore, based on personal reflection in English reading teaching and a

preliminary survey on students' understanding of the reading course, this case study explores how OBE mode could possibly be realized in college English reading teaching.

### 3. English Reading Design Based on OBE Mode

#### 3.1 Sample English Reading Design

Wang (2021, p. 4) on summary of related literature on OBE, pointed out that the characteristics OBE include clear objectives, process flexibility, comparability, and students' active participation. The key to the implementation of OBE mode is to define the specific objectives of the outcome, that is, to set teaching objectives based on learning outcomes. Process flexibility means that students are, to a certain extent, free to arrange their learning process based on personal states. Comparability means that OBE makes it possible and realistic to compare students from different schools or regions with reference to the given objectives. Being one of the advantages of OBE mode, Students' active participation emphasize their own initiative in the whole learning process. The current study first refines Wang & Liu's MOOC curriculum design (2017) from three dimensions of knowledge, ability, and competence (Table 1); on basis of which, it then designs the reading unit in accordance with the four steps in implementation of the OBE mode, namely, defining learning outcomes, realizing learning outcomes, evaluating learning outcomes and applying learning outcomes (Acharya, 2003, see Wang, 2021).

**Table 1. OBE-Based Reading Course Design**

Unit	Theme	Objectives	Defining objectives			Realizing objectives
			Knowledge	Ability	Competence	
Unit 3 (Text A)	How My	1 know how to use key words and phrases	Remembering	Applying	Team-work	Reading circle/lecture
	Mother-in-Law Replaced My Husband	2 understand complex structures	Understanding	Applying/analyzing	Team-work/logical thinking	Reading circle/lecture
		3 grasp the theme and key arguments through text analysis	Understanding	Applying/analyzing/evaluating	Team-work/critical thinking	Reading circle/guided discovery/video material
		4 illustrate the concept of cultural shock with examples	Understanding	Applying/analyzing/evaluating/creating	Team-work/cross-cultural awareness/critical thinking	Reading circle/personal reflection
		5 familiarize with the writing of comparison/contrast essay	Understanding	Applying/analyzing/evaluating/creating	cross-cultural awareness/critical thinking	Brainstorming/lecture/writing

### 3.2 Defining Learning Outcomes

Title of Text A (this unit) is *How My Future Mother-in-Law Replaced My Husband*, and the key theme concerns cross-cultural differences in parenting. The author divides the unit objectives into five parts: key vocabulary learning, complex structure analysis, theme analysis, theme evaluation (talking about cultural differences) and theme application (writing training), and defines them from three dimensions of knowledge, ability, and competence. The author mainly refers to Bloom's Taxonomy of Cognitive Objectives to define each teaching objective (Anderson et al., 2001). For example, key vocabulary is defined as the cognitive ability of 'remembering' at the knowledge level while it is defined as 'applying' at the ability level. Theme analysis is defined as 'understanding' at the knowledge level; while at the ability level, it is reflected in the progression from 'application' to 'analysis' and finally to 'evaluation'. In the reading teaching design of the chosen unit, three facts stand out: first of all, the learning outcomes (reflected in teaching objectives) are characterized by increasing difficulty and gradual improvement. To be more specific, it starts from knowledge learning and grammatical analysis to theme mining and finally to theme application (writing assignment). Secondly, each teaching objective is defined from the perspective of competence, which reflects the integration of content teaching and moral education and is in line with the humanistic requirements of college English teaching and moral education. In short, the reading design reflects the layered progression from easy stuff to difficult part, and finally settles on analysis, discussion and writing practice, paying attention to the all-round improvement in students' competence.

### 3.3 Realizing Learning Outcomes

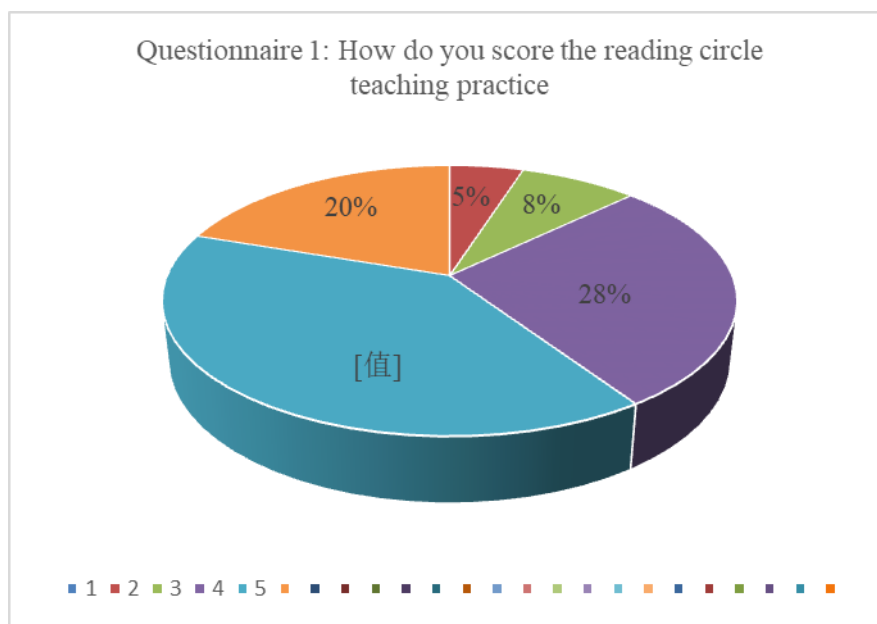
This unit reading design caters to students' initiative. Therefore, the expected learning outcomes are mainly realized in the reading circle, supplemented by teachers' explanation and classroom discussion. The design aims at cultivating students' sense of teamwork and innovative thinking ability. Taking into consideration the fact that students' English proficiency is poor, and this is the first time for them to do a reading circle practice, the author selected four roles in the reading circle, that is, Discussion leader, Word master, Summarizer and Connector in accordance with the teaching objectives. (Note 2) Students are guided to complete the reading circle task after class, and then carry out in-class presentation. The role of 'Word master' encourages students to explore the deep meaning of vocabulary, so it is required that they should select representative vocabulary from the reading text and offer reasons to justify for the selection. Based on students' classroom presentation, the teacher further guides them through semantic and pragmatic appreciation of certain vocabulary. Theme understanding is the core of the reading text, so the two roles of 'Discussion leader' and 'Summarizer' are assigned. The former organizes group discussions, asks and answer text-based questions while the latter role is required to summarize the content of the text and find out the keywords based on the summary. Based on the students' in-class presentation, the teacher guides students to comment on the work of each group and then deepens students' understanding of unit theme through a supplementary video entitled *The beautiful, hard work of co-parenting*.

### *3.4 Evaluating Learning Outcomes*

The evaluation of learning outcomes is mainly reflected in the three aspects of group presentation scoring, after-class exercises, and vocabulary test. The group presentation scoring and vocabulary test were completed on the mosoteach APP. Class monitor is responsible for dividing students into groups and loading the name list onto mosoteach. In terms of scoring, the total score is 10; the teacher's scoring and students' between-group scoring accounted for 50% respectively. The evaluation criteria cover the overall completion of the group task (70%) and performance of the group representative (30%). It is worth noting that for between-group scoring, the teacher required students to evaluate (or comment on) the works of other groups to avoid random scoring. The teacher screened after-class exercises, and this unit focused on the translation part.

### *3.5 Applying Learning Outcomes*

Teachers' application of learning outcomes can effectively promote the teaching quality. In order to intuitively understand students' evaluation and attitudes towards the reading circle teaching practice, the teacher carried out an informal questionnaire on the mosoteach APP. Simple questions are proposed, such as "How do you score the reading circle teaching practice" (Figure 1). (Note 3) 60% students (in one class) score 4 to 5 (5 as the highest), which means most students think highly of the new reading teaching practice. The reading circle method really brings benefits to English reading teaching. First, the method pays attention to students' initiative and helps students improve their autonomous learning ability; secondly, this teaching method has strong workability in that students can better mine the reading text and grasp its theme through group work; thirdly, APPs such as mosoteach makes it more convenient for students' interactive evaluation and for teachers' collection of reliable in-class statistical data. However, it is still apparent that some students still prefer the more traditional word-by-word explanation method adopted in Unit 1. Therefore, choice of certain teaching method should be based on many factors such as students' language proficiency, students' needs, difficulty index of the text, popularity of the unit topic and others.



**Figure 1. Scoring the Reading Circle Teaching Practice**

#### 4. Implications for College English Reading Teaching Reform

##### 4.1 Setting Clear Course Objectives by Adhering to Outcome-Oriented Concept

The OBE concept emphasizes outcome setting and then a retrospective design. College English reading course design should first clarify expected teaching objectives from dimensions of knowledge, skills and competence, and then make clear specific requirements for each objective, whether it is at the cognitive level of remembering, understanding, applying, evaluating or creating. Course design based on clear objectives makes it possible to guarantee the quality of reading teaching and to better promote the follow-up reading teaching reform.

##### 4.2 Meeting Students' Needs by Adhering to the Student-Oriented Concept

Teaching reform should cater to students' needs. Before the study, the author has conducted a preliminary investigation by means of the questionnaire to better understand students' expectations for reading and their learning difficulties. The author also clearly informed students of the reading teaching reform practice, and obtained students' consent. Following the unit reform practice, the author used the mosoteach APP to carry out a brief questionnaire on students' evaluation of the teaching reform. The survey shows that half of the students prefer the more traditional word-by-word explanation method or maintain a neutral stance at the choice. It shows not all students support the reform practice, which deserves due attention.

##### 4.3 Fully Tapping Students' Potential by Adhering to the Concept of Creativity

Language learning should maximize students' initiative and fully involve students. The author initially held that the role of "Connector" in the reading circle should be an open one in that it enables students to associate what is learned to personal experiences, to historical events, to current social affairs and any other possible topics. However, students' performance in the role of 'Word master' also surprised

me. The ‘Word master’ requires students to select 5-6 representative words from the given text and to justify for their choice of a certain word. Most students tend to choose those words of difficulty or importance and explain them in more general terms. However, there are still students who try to interpret typical words like ‘negotiation’ by defining its irreplaceable role in the given text.

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### Notes

- Note 1. College English in the current research refers to English courses taken by non-English majors.
- Note 2. There are different roles in a ‘reading circle’. The current study selected the above-mentioned four roles in accordance with students’ English proficiency and teaching objectives.
- Note 3. Three classes have done the informal online questionnaires respectively. Due to space limitation, results of the questionnaire done by the class majoring in education and education is shown here.