

# Research on the Cultivation of Integrated Reading and Writing Ability of Business English Majors Based on the OBE Concept

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**Abstract:** English writing ability is one of the language skills that is relatively difficult to improve, and an English learner's ability of critical thinking is reflected in his or her level of writing skill. This paper explores the teaching model of academic English writing courses for business English majors in China, and discusses the possible approaches to enhancing students' critical thinking ability from the perspective of the OBE concept.

**Key words:** Reading and Writing; Critical Thinking Ability; Outcome-Based Education

## 1. Introduction

In 2020, the Ministry of Education released *The Teaching Guidelines for Foreign Language and Literature Majors*, which serves as a guideline for the education of foreign language majors (English major, Business English major, and Translation major) at Chinese universities, and *The Guideline* stipulates specific course recommendations for curriculum. *The Guidelines* set a clear goal for the education of Business English majors—talents with global perspective with high English proficiency in various fields of foreign affairs. Regarding the curricula, *The Guidelines* also specified the requirements for core courses (language skills courses and specialized knowledge courses). For specialized courses (compulsory and elective), *The Guidelines* suggested that schools set elective courses based on their own positioning, conditions, and characteristics. The release of *The Guidelines* has provided nationwide guidance for the education of undergraduate talents in Business English, prompting schools to revise their curricula.

Regarding course instruction, *The Guidelines* proposed the educational concept of “student-centered, outcome-oriented, and continuous improvement,” requiring “reasonable setting of course learning objectives and assessment standards, ensuring that course objectives are measurable, achievable, and accessible.” Before

the release of *The Guidelines* in 2020, the quality of talent cultivation in Business English programs across various institutions has been uneven. For example, at a certain application-oriented undergraduate university in Shaoxing, the 2021 cohort's curriculum was largely based on the Guidelines. However, according to that year's TEM-4 exam results for the class of 2021 (English majors, Business English majors and Translation majors), the average passing rate of all the students was about 50%, while that of Business English majors was only 35%. Is the lower passing rate related to the curriculum reforms brought about by *The Guidelines*? Some teachers believe that the TEM-4 results are related to the business-oriented curriculum, which focus only on business English in learning content.

How to resolve this issue? How to maintain and consolidate students' strong foreign language reading and writing ability? *The Guidelines* call for establishing “an outcome-based mechanism for evaluating teaching effectiveness and a quality assurance system for teaching.” This study discusses the approaches to improving the English reading and writing skills of Business English majors from the perspective of outcome-based education. By summarizing experiences and continuously making improvements, it aims to cultivate talents that meet the market demand for the foreign trade industry in Shaoxing and Zhejiang Province.

## 2. Analysis of Critical Thinking Ability of Business English Majors

The “absence of critical thinking” among English majors is a topic that has drawn the attention of many scholars in the field of foreign languages. After undergoing reforms, the English major has now expanded into three specializations: English, Business English, and Translation, collectively referred to as foreign language and literature majors. Therefore, the issue of the “absence of critical thinking” in English majors discussed in academia actually

pertains to the broader category of foreign language and literature majors. Many scholars have explored the root causes of deficiencies in critical thinking and how to measure critical thinking skills. Huang Yuanshen (1998) pointed out that the absence of critical thinking among English majors primarily refers to the lack of critical thinking skills, meaning that students lack abilities in analysis, synthesis, judgment, reasoning, reflection, and discrimination. From a writing perspective, this is mainly reflected in content that lacks depth, superficial language expression, and arguments that are not sufficiently supported by detailed evidence, remaining at a general and vague level. Wen Qiufang and Liu Runqing (2006) believe that writing can be used to analyze students' critical thinking characteristics. Mu Congjun (2016) conducted a survey on the critical thinking ability in writing among English majors and proposed a writing critical thinking quality evaluation model with six indicators, including relevance, clarity, accuracy, depth, breadth, and rhetorical coherence. Zhang Lingli (2022) did a case study on the development of critical thinking skills among foreign language majors and confirmed the multiple pathways to the development of critical thinking skills. Wang Honglei (2020) studied the effect of research-oriented teaching on critical thinking skills in Foreign Language Majors by using semantics course as an example. Current studies show that the potential for development of critical thinking skills for foreign language majors is still great and needs to be further explored.

The author believes that there is a certain correlation between critical thinking ability and writing skills. Taking last year's TEM-4 as an example, the scores of the writing part are relatively satisfactory compared to the other parts of grammar and vocabulary, etc, but this does not conceal the problems students have in English writing. The three dimensions for evaluating English writing are the ability to present content, language expression ability, and discourse organization ability. For TEM-4 writing evaluation criteria, the proportions of these three dimensions are 50%, 35%, and 15% respectively. The accuracy of language expression directly affects the depth of content and ideas, which depends on vocabulary and grammar skills. For example, in past TEM-4 exams at a university, the average accuracy rate for the vocabulary and grammar part is only

about 60%, indicating that students still have great potential for improvement in vocabulary and grammar, which has also been confirmed in the author's teaching practice. A relatively limited vocabulary is reflected in the monotonous and insufficient word choice in students' writing; weak grammar knowledge is reflected in simple sentence structures and various sentence issues, such as run-on sentences, stringy sentences, excessive use of simple sentences, dangling modifiers, and sentence fragments.

### **3. The Online and Offline Blended Teaching Model in Enhancing Critical Thinking Skills**

Experiences from online teaching during the pandemic and using platforms like Pigai website to assist English writing instruction indicate that a blended learning and teaching model, which combines online and offline methods, can train and improve students' writing skills and foster the development of critical thinking abilities. Enhancing students' ability to appreciate English writing is one way to improve students' critical thinking ability. Peer review tasks also enable students to effectively evaluate and provide feedback on essay writing, thereby enhancing their ability to appreciate writing. Peer review tasks can involve evaluating language use as well as assessing paragraph structure, coherence, and content development—for instance, whether the topic sentence and supporting points are persuasive, whether there are sufficient supporting details after each point, whether the paragraph achieves coherence, whether the use of logical connectors is appropriate, and whether grammatical and vocabulary cohesive devices are applied appropriately. The process of teachers' guiding students in peer review is essentially a process of training and enhancing students' appreciation skills and critical thinking abilities.

The cultivation of writing awareness is particularly vital for the cultivation of critical thinking ability. Take the writing section of the 2018 English Major Level 4 Exam as an example. The writing task requires summarizing the main idea of the reading material and commenting on Stephen Corey's views mentioned in the material. According to the method of achieving textual cohesion through repetition of key words, students can brainstorm by listing key words from the reading material, such as tribal people, conservation, protected

areas, tourists, rights, experts, and discuss how to use vocabulary reiteration to enhance textual coherence. Therefore, many students, applying their knowledge about vocabulary reiteration, wrote synonyms for tribal people, such as indigenous people and aboriginal inhabitants, in their writing.

Through collaborative learning, especially using online correction platforms for peer review, students can identify issues in cohesion or unclear logical relationships between sentences in each other's writing. For example, in the sentence 'As the singing and dancing competition have been held many times, only painting competition has never been held.' The first and second parts of this sentence do not form a cause-and-effect relationship and can be revised as: 'Compared with the frequently-held competitions such as singing or dancing ones, the painting competition is rarely seen.'

Problems with cohesion in student essays are often not easily detected through self-proofreading alone. Besides direct guidance from teachers, collaborative peer review can be very effective and help to improve students' writing appreciation skills. Teachers can also use such examples to guide students on how to apply writing techniques they have learned. For instance, when teaching expository writing, teachers may organize students to learn various writing methods, such as chronological order, spatial order, process description, cause-and-effect, illustrating and defining, classification, and comparison and contrast. However, many students still feel confused about how to use these methods, mainly because they did not adequately prepare and organize their ideas before writing and did not realize that consciously using appropriate logical connectors in writing is practicing these methods. The previous sentence is a clear example of using comparison and contrast to discuss different types of competitions. For another example: 'I am not able to go to the beach with you; moreover, thanks for asking me. The logical relationship in this sentence is used incorrectly and should be revised to: 'I am not able to go to the beach with you; nevertheless, thanks for asking me.'

Many students are accustomed to using memorized sentence patterns in writing, but teachers need to guide students to use sentence structures or classic patterns in the context of specific situations and not blindly. For example,

regarding the topic 'whether parents should take leave during their children's school term to travel with them, some students wrote the following sentence when summarizing reading materials: Whether the term-time holiday should be banned has aroused a heated discussion for a long time.... However, the original text referred to the education authorities prohibiting parents from taking leave to go on vacation with their children during the school term. The student's sentence, however, suggests significant disagreement on both sides of the issue, thus failing to accurately capture the main content of the reading material. This example also illustrates that in writing instruction, teachers should guide students to apply classic sentence patterns in specific contexts. For instance, teachers can assign group cooperative learning tasks to discuss writing techniques and highlights in model essays and reinforce impressions through classroom presentations. Teachers can also showcase English writings by students from China and the U.S.; through cooperative learning and discussion, students can discover differences in writing awareness and thinking between Chinese and American university students, thereby deepening their understanding of writing techniques and applying them in practice. Students can learn the writing techniques of introduction and conclusion paragraphs through discussion. For example, if the writing topic is 'mall people,' students may realize through discussion that a classification method can be used in writing. Then the teacher can guide students to think about ways to write the introduction, starting with the cause-and-effect relationship of visiting shopping centers, linking to 'fun,' and when introducing the topic, first discuss which social activities bring enjoyment, leading to the sentence, 'visiting shopping centers brings enjoyment to certain groups,' thereby understanding that an introduction writing technique is to first elaborate on a concept or subject related to the theme and then extend it to a more specific topic. Similarly, when learning the conclusion paragraph, teachers can guide students to summarize through the following example that, besides the common summarizing method, one can also further recommend or propose solutions: 'In conclusion, it's time for a new type of conservation, one that puts tribal people's rights at its heart, and that recognizes they are the best conservationists and guardians of the natural

world.’

Pigai website offers feedback to students’ essay writing, allowing students to see their scores and feedback after submitting essays and make revisions. Students can also evaluate each other’s work, and with proper guidance from teachers, they can gradually learn to assess their own and their peers’ essays, enhancing their writing appreciation skills. For example, in the writing part of the 2018 TEM-4 (Test for English Majors Band 4) exam, the reading material offers Stephen Corey’s criticism of local governments by saying that many local government agencies established protected areas in the name of environmental protection, displacing indigenous residents, but allowed tourists to hunt in these areas. . The following is the topic sentence of the model essay for the 2018 TEM-4 writing section: As far as I am concerned, I completely agree with Stephen Corey’s opinion on this issue. Teachers can guide students to rewrite this sentence in different ways, which helps develop their vocabulary skills. Some students wrote sentences like: As far as I am concerned, I can’t agree with Stephen Corey’s opinion any more on this issue. As far as I am concerned, Stephen Corey’s opinion on this issue is quite reasonable. As far as I am concerned, Stephen Corey is fully justified in defending the rights of indigenous people. Teaching practice shows that exercises in rewriting topic sentences or supporting sentences can improve students’ writing awareness and help them accumulate effective English expressions.

#### **4. Conclusion**

For learners, the improvement of critical thinking ability is closely linked to the enhancement of writing skills. Under the guidance of teachers, students, through learning writing knowledge and engaging in extensive reading and writing practice both online and offline, can gradually improve their writing awareness and writing evaluation ability, laying a solid foundation for the development of critical thinking skills.

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