

Research on the Student Engagement in English Reading Practice Courses Based on the OBE Concept

Yan Gao

Foreign Languages College, Shanxi University, Taiyuan, China

Email: georgina0321@163.com

How to cite this paper: Gao, Y. (2026). Research on the Student Engagement in English Reading Practice Courses Based on the OBE Concept. *Open Journal of Social Sciences*, 14, 227-238.

<https://doi.org/10.4236/jss.2026.142014>

Received: January 12, 2026

Accepted: February 10, 2026

Published: February 13, 2026

Copyright © 2026 by author(s) and Scientific Research Publishing Inc.

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0).

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>



Open Access

Abstract

Guided by the OBE (Outcome-Based Education) concept, this study designs the teaching in reverse based on learning outcomes and social demands, forming a major English reading course system with practice as the main focus. It explores students' engagement in this practice course, summarizes the suitable teaching mode for the English reading practice course, and addresses the common issues of low student engagement and relatively backward use of information technology in general reading courses. The research data indicates that after the reform, students' engagement in the practice teaching mode of the reading course becomes higher in terms of behavioral, cognitive and emotional dimension, and good learning outcomes have been achieved.

Keywords

OBE Concept, English Reading Practice Courses, Classroom Engagement, Learning Outcomes

1. Introduction

The basic reading course offered in English majors, which some institutions name as Basic English, Intensive Reading or Comprehensive English, is a course aimed at cultivating students' knowledge of the foreign language system and their comprehensive application abilities. According to the "National Quality Criteria for Undergraduate Teaching (Part I)" (Foreign Languages and Literatures) (hereinafter referred to as the "National Quality Criteria") (National Teaching Advisory Board of Higher Education under the Ministry of Education, 2018), it belongs to the category of major skills courses and is classified together with major knowledge courses as core courses for foreign language majors, and

is generally a compulsory course. It is the most important professional basic course for English majors, comprehensively cultivating students' five basic language skills: listening, speaking, reading, writing and translation. However, due to the large amount of class hours for English intensive reading, the abundance of teaching content and heavy tasks, insufficient communication between teachers and students, traditional classroom forms, and limited teaching resources, etc., language skills have not received sufficient practical training. Students' classroom engagement is relatively low, and the situation is complex (e.g., [Ing & Victorino, 2016](#)).

In "The Teaching Guide for Foreign Languages and Literature Undergraduate Majors in Colleges and Universities (Part I): English Majors (hereinafter referred to as the "Guidelines") issued in 2020 (by the [National Foreign Language and Literature Major Teaching Advisory Board of Higher Education under the Ministry of Education & Teaching Advisory Board for Undergraduate Programs in English Language and Literature, 2020](#)), it was proposed that the Practice in the English major courses be one of the four links (the other three being general basic courses, the major core courses, and the major-oriented courses), including major practice courses, professional internships, social practice, international exchanges, and graduation theses (designs), accounting for approximately 15% of the total credits of the English major. This proportion is relatively low compared to other parts. The traditional language skills are basically taught and implemented through major core courses. [Zhang et al. \(2023\)](#) pointed out that the National Standards have not included training practices related to language skills in the "practical teaching link". Research surveys show that each college and major has independently incorporated it into the talents' cultivation plan, but the current proportion standards are inconsistent so far.

In terms of practical content, the current practice teaching of English majors shows insufficient attention and popularization, lack of innovation in organizational forms, disconnection between teaching content and practical applications, and difficulties in meeting social demands. The Guidelines emphasize that the English major should adhere to connotative, diversified and innovative development, and cultivate English-majored and compound English talents with communication skills, humanistic qualities, Chinese sentiments and international vision that are needed by The Times and expected by the country. It provides a basis for the cultivation of innovative talents in English-related majors across the country, the deepening of professional reform and the promotion of classroom revolution. Based on this, this study attempts to combine modern information technology to carry out practice teaching in English majors' reading classes, improve and optimize the learning process, and enhance learning outcomes, so as to explore and design the practical teaching syllabus and teaching model suitable for the reading courses of English majors. Therefore, this study will summarize the reform path of the reading curriculum, based on experimental data.

2. Literature Review

2.1. OBE (Outcome-Based Education)

The concept of outcome-based education was first proposed by the American scholar Spady (1981). The core concept of the outcome-based education concept is that the teaching objective is the final outcome that students achieve through the teaching process. Under the guidance of this education concept, the classroom teaching of the course mainly starts from the needs. The final outcome, to a certain extent, can be understood as the true ability that students acquire after the entire teaching process is completed. Therefore, OBE is also known as competency-oriented education, demand-oriented or goal-oriented education.

Outcome-based education mainly addresses four issues: 1) What learning outcomes (knowledge, quality, ability and morality, etc.) do we want students to achieve? 2) Why we enable students to achieve such learning outcomes? 3) How can we effectively help students achieve these learning outcomes? 4) How do we know that students have achieved these learning outcomes? (Li, 2014) The teaching design that applies the OBE concept in the teaching process focuses on whether the final learning outcomes of students meet the social demands, emphasizing that students can acquire the knowledge, skills and professional qualities they need after graduation.

Learning is a process of self-development. Students should be allowed to exert their potential and initiative during the learning process, rather than merely completing the courses as required by the teachers and thus fulfilling the learning tasks. Therefore, students should be allowed to have more space for autonomous learning and constantly explore and discover new knowledge during the learning process. In the teaching process, learning is an interactive one. Students should establish good interactive relationships with teachers, classmates and the social environment in order to better understand the course content, master learning skills better and ultimately achieve learning goals. The outcome-based education theory has shifted from focusing on the students' learning process to emphasizing their learning outcomes. It has changed the traditional educational concept where teachers take the lead and students play a supporting role, emphasizing student-centeredness and attaching importance to students' learning outcomes.

2.2. Learning Outcomes

Learning outcomes, as a specialized term in the field of education, emerged during the process in which many scholars studied and discussed how to define and express educational goals. It was first proposed by the American scholar Venkatesh et al. (1979). Essentially, it refers to the result obtained by students after participating in some activities, whether intentionally or unintentionally. The Joint Commission on Educational Evaluation Standards of the United States (2003) defines learning outcomes as the expectations of students after completing specific learning, that is, the extent to which students gain in terms of knowledge and comprehension, practical skills, attitudes and values, and individual behaviors

when they undergo course learning, professional learning, or obtain a degree. “Quality assurance and accreditation: A glossary of basis terms and definitions” published by UNESCO (2007) defines learning outcomes as the description of what outcomes learners are expected to know, understand and demonstrate after going through a certain period of study, a lesson or a unit. Apart from official institutions, different domestic and foreign scholars have also conducted research on the learning outcomes. Ewell (2001) defines learning outcomes from the perspective of output, believing that students’ learning outcomes are the outputs after students carry out learning activities, including cognition, skills, emotions, and performance after graduation. In domestic researches, the definition of learning outcomes is still not very clear. Many scholars use terms such as “learning effectiveness”, “learning effect”, and “learning gain” to refer to learning outcomes. Bai (2012) believes that learning outcomes are the ability of students to prove their development in dimensions such as knowledge, skills, and values after completing a series of classroom studies.

2.3. Student Engagement

Student engagement, since it was first researched as the synonym of involvement by Astin (1984), has enjoyed considerable attention in the literature and widely recognized as critical to student’s academic learning and success. A relative comprehensive review is from Trowler and Trowler’s (2010) work, which states student engagement as “the investment of time, effort and other relevant resources by both students and their institutions intended to optimize the student experience and enhance the learning outcomes and development of students and the performance, and reputation of the institution”. According to Fredricks et al. (2004), behavioral engagement is termed as students’ positive conduct and actions towards school and learning (e.g., attending classes, concentrating, previewing and completing school-work), and involvement in academic and social activities in the classroom and school in general (e.g., attending and contributing to class discussions). Cognitive engagement encompasses students’ self-regulated and strategic approach to learning, such as the pursuit and effort to comprehend complex ideas and master difficult skills. And the emotional or affective engagement focuses on students’ sentiments toward school, such as feelings of enjoyment, interest, or anxiety, and sense of belonging with other students, teachers, and the school.

Based on the framework of engagement, student engagement, at classroom level, may be concluded as their behavioral, cognitive, psychological investment of their time, effort and mentality that contribute to their performance in the class and their academic learning outcomes.

3. Research Method and Data Collection

This study selects second-year students majoring in English at a certain university in Shanxi Province as the research subjects. The course is the basic reading course for the second year of the English major. The textbook used is the fourth volume

of the third edition of “Contemporary College English”. The teaching staff are English teachers who have been teaching in this major for many years. The research team assists in designing the syllabus and conducted teaching observations simultaneously. The specific research is divided into four stages:

1) The Investigation stage: Centered on students and oriented towards learning outcomes, the study designs questionnaires based on students’ behavioral, cognitive, emotional engagement and other experiences. And individual interviews are also conducted with the instructors of this course to analyze the current situations and reasons.

2) The Design Stage: Based on the traditional teaching objectives of each unit in one semester and the skills required to be mastered, the study redesign the teaching syllabus and teaching mode, changing the input-oriented reading teaching mode to output-oriented practice learning. Each unit should reasonably design practice activities and requirements. And it integrates new technological tools during this period, deepening and broadening the means of students’ output. A number of new technology application softwares and equipments are fully prepared, including multi-person collaborative PPTS, video production software, shooting and streaming mobile phones and tripods, etc.

3) The Implementation Stage: The teaching of each unit will be gradually advanced in accordance with the teaching syllabus and plan. Students can choose practice activities based on their own major, preferences, and needs (two practice activities have to be selected within the semester, including both written and oral output forms) and they form teams. Teachers provide both technical and knowledge support for the activities that each group of students needs to complete. After the task is completed, a demonstration needs to be presented to the whole class. At the end of the semester, each student fills out a second questionnaire and conducts self-evaluation, classmate evaluation, and retrospective writing. Teacher evaluations are conducted as well. All the questionnaire results and qualitative data are conducted.

4) The Reflection stage: Based on the above qualitative and quantitative data, the research group conducts a discussion, reflects on the previous literature, revises and improves the practice teaching syllabus, and summarizes the appropriateness and application mode of practice teaching.

4. Results Analysis

This study has mainly collected and analyzed data from the Investigation Stage and the Implementation Stage. The former involves the quantitative data from the students’ questionnaires and the qualitative data from the teacher’s interview at the beginning of the semester, while the latter involves the qualitative data both from the students and the teacher, and the quantitative data from the students’ questionnaires after the semester.

4.1. Survey Data of the Investigation Stage

The questionnaire comprises 32 questions in total. The first two questions pertain

to basic information, including students' names and majors. The final three questions focus on practical teaching and encompass both multiple-choice and open-ended short-answer formats. The remaining questions are adapted from Kong Qiping's (2003) questionnaire design, with an emphasis on themes such as students' behavioral engagement, cognitive participation, and emotional experiences. A Likert scale format is utilized for these questions (Table 1).

Table 1. Current situations of students' engagement in English reading courses.

	Behavioral	Cognitive	Emotional experience
The numbers	8	12	7
The average	162.6	146.4	152.4

A total of 44 valid questionnaires were collected. Based on the scoring method of the Likert scale, the five response options were assigned values from 1 to 5, with the lowest level of engagement a value of 1, and the highest level of engagement a value of 5. Subsequently, the sum of all assigned values was calculated and divided by the total number of questions to determine the average score. The results reveal that students' behavioral, cognitive, and emotional engagement are at low levels on the whole. Among these, cognitive engagement is the most deficient, with an average of 146.4. Emotional engagement follows. Behavioral engagement demonstrates a slightly better outcome, with an average of 162.6.

Based on teacher interviews, students tend to primarily listen in class and passively absorb information. While they are reluctant to engage in deep thinking, they habitually complete tasks assigned by teachers, resulting in slightly higher behavioral engagement. For example, influenced by teachers, students have developed the habit of frequently using dictionaries, but when it comes to texts, they merely skim through without reflecting on the content or key points. They also complete homework on time but rarely demonstrate extended behaviors. Regarding teacher questioning, 45.5% of students chose "sometimes." Teachers noted that student responses primarily stem from being prompted rather than voluntary participation, with this forced behavior scoring as low as 131—the lowest engagement score among all items.

Cognitively, students exhibited the most passive attitudes. For instance, they believe English learning—whether for vocabulary or grammar—relies heavily on memorization, and they frequently forget what they learn (item 12 achieves the lowest engagement score of 130). Lacking goals or plans, they do not extend or connect their learning, rely on teachers, and avoid critical evaluation.

Emotionally, students most notably expressed "enjoying the current teacher's instructional style, which emphasizes passive listening with occasional interaction" and "lacking confidence in English class, being unwilling to actively participate or produce oral output." The former scored 82—the lowest across all items. Teacher interviews attribute these problems to years of traditional teaching and

learning habits. The lowest scores in these three dimensions collectively reflect students' reluctance to answer questions proactively, their tendency to merely follow the teacher's lead, lack of active thinking, and reliance on teacher-centered instruction.

In comparison to behavioral engagement, cognitive and emotional engagement are more unsatisfactory. That is to say, under the teacher's classroom guidance, students are forced to invest in some learning behaviors, but they show no initiative, exhibit passive emotions with poor experiential feelings, and fail to focus cognitively. They lack plans, methods, and do not engage in thinking or evaluation. In short, students do not know why or how to learn, lacking motivation and metacognition of methods.

Additionally, regarding the application of information technology in the curriculum, the study also interviewed teaching faculty. The main findings show that teachers rarely use new information technologies in class. Except for using live-streaming platforms like Rain Classroom and Tencent Meeting during the pandemic, regular instruction mainly relies on displaying Word documents and PPT files, occasionally supplemented by video presentations. A minority of assignments are submitted via the Learning Platform.

4.2. Survey Data of the Implementation Stage

Based on the survey data from the first-stage investigation, researchers believe that the reform of English reading courses is imperative. Guided by the OBE teaching concept, researchers have reset teaching objectives and syllabus that align with the talent needs of society. They adopted backward design for teaching content, strengthened practical activities, reformed evaluation methods, and implemented these measures proactively. After implementing teaching reform cases across multiple units, students filled out questionnaires and task self-evaluation forms, providing positive evaluations and reflections on their learning processes throughout the semester.

The questionnaire consists of 20 items, with the first 16 being multiple-choice questions (only one answer is correct) and the last 4 multiple-choice questions (more than one answer is correct). Items 1 to 4 address students' overall evaluation of the course, including the overall impressions, organization forms, practice activity content, and evaluation methods. Items 5 to 20 involve students' self-evaluation, covering overall improvements in knowledge, skills, cognition, and emotion. A total of 33 valid questionnaires were collected.

The results show that over 90% of the students are satisfied with the overall quality of the course according to the first 4 questions, especially the practice activity content and the organization form of the activities. See **Table 2**.

It is evident that students have shown great interest in the fresh classroom format, and their emotional engagement has significantly improved. Under the interesting activity content and effective organization, students' motivation has been greatly stimulated, and their behavioral engagement has also increased in both fre-

quency and quality. Videos of each group's presentation were recorded and uploaded to the software, allowing teachers and researchers to clearly observe students' facial expressions, language expressions, and body language, and understand the efforts and gains students have made in terms of behavior, cognition, and emotion for the performance.

Table 2. Course quality survey.

Questionnaire	Question	Options	Statistical Results
1	Overall impression	Strongly agree, Agree	93.6%
		Average	3%
		Disagree, Strongly disagree	3%
2	Organization form	Strongly agree, Agree	97%
		Average	3%
		Disagree, Strongly disagree	0
3	Practice content	Strongly agree, agree	97%
		Average	3%
		Disagree, Strongly disagree	0
4	Evaluation methods	Strongly agree, Agree	91%
		Average	9%
		Disagree, Strongly disagree	0

The specific gains are mainly reflected in students' learning outcomes in terms of knowledge, skills, cognition, and emotional experience. According to the Likert five-point scale, where strongly agree is 5 points and agree is 4 points, and so on, the total and average values were calculated (except for multiple-choice questions), and the results are shown in **Table 3**.

Based on the total value and average value, it can be easily found that the growth of knowledge and skills is relatively close, and the cognitive and emotional investment has been significantly enhanced. Among them, the most prominent is that students are willing to study the relevant materials of the text carefully in both cognitive and emotional aspects (total value being 163), to obtain more thematic knowledge and background knowledge. Secondly, they are willing to communicate and exchange with classmates and teachers (total value being 150). This indicates that students have greatly improved their learning initiative, solved the motivation problem, and the improvement of students' knowledge and skills will be easily achieved.

Table 3. Learning outcomes.

Dimensions	Question	Content	Total value	Average value
Knowledge	9	Mastery of knowledge and background	146	146
	5	Improved learning efficiency	144	
Skills	10	Utilizing online resources	149	146.7
	11	Learning relevant software	147	
	17	Gaining control over software	MC	
	18	Multiple abilities enhanced	MC	
	19	Influencing factors (technical)	MC	
	6	Study relevant materials carefully	163	
	7	Actively participate in class	147	
	8	Willing to communicate with teachers and classmates	150	
	12	Recognize the effectiveness of information resources	148	
	Cognition & Emotion	13	Willing to invest in learning network technology	
14		Think that learning information technology is not difficult	141	
15		Believe that practice forms are more effective	146	
16		Computer-assisted learning increases interest	147	
20		Learning obstacles	MC	

4.3. The Qualitative Data after the Implementation Stage

In addition to quantitative data statistics, the research also collected qualitative data from students. Specifically, at the end of the semester, students were asked to self-evaluate, peer-evaluate, and be evaluated by the teacher based on the tasks they had completed and the knowledge and skill goals required by the text unit. They were to describe the changes in their knowledge and skills as well as their cognitive and emotional experiences. After collecting the data, the results were analyzed using the Nvivo software.

A total of 35 qualitative data forms were received. The core points were reflected in four aspects: practice learning, reflection and growth, teamwork, and emotional experience. In summary, all evaluations clearly indicate that at the knowledge and skill level, students acquired background knowledge, mastered corresponding vocabulary, phrases, and other language knowledge, as well as knowledge of article genres. Their ability to use modern information technology was also improved. For example, "In this task, I gained a deep understanding of New York's Central Park, from its construction history to its current development. There are many experiences worth learning from for domestic park construction. In addition, I

learned the writing methods and related vocabulary and phrases of travelogues and gained a better understanding of this type of article genre.” “In this task of making a PPT on water resources background knowledge, through the process of making the PPT, I not only gained an understanding of the importance of water resources but also improved my ability to make PPTs and search for and screen professional knowledge.” Students used a considerable amount of space to reflect on their shortcomings and made cognitive and emotional changes. For instance, “I recognized my strengths in converting data into tables, optimizing PPT layouts, and creating dynamic views, but I also realized my weaknesses in framework construction and the collection and utilization of relevant knowledge.” “I have a certain ability to use PPT software, but there are still deficiencies. I cannot flexibly insert hyperlinks, and I am not proficient in picture transition effects.” Additionally, 95% of the students mentioned teamwork and the influence of outstanding team members. For example, “This member always maintained a high level of focus and enthusiasm in learning the text content. She quickly grasped the core points of the text and was responsible for making the PPT related to the tour guide script. In group communication and cooperation, she actively put forward her own opinions and patiently listened to others’ suggestions, and was able to integrate the team’s ideas well, contributing a lot to our project. She not only completed her tasks on time but also provided useful references and suggestions for the team”; and the process of their own change and progress, such as “The preparation process also exercised my ability to organize the team, clearly divide tasks, promote tasks, and improve communication skills. I am very grateful to all the members of our group. Their active cooperation was the fundamental guarantee for the completion of our project.” The final experience was summarized by students with words like “positive”, “happy”, “joyful”, and “fulfilled”. This was the most valuable gain from this research.

However, due to the relatively small sample size, lack of a control group, and the specific context of English reading courses, this research data may not be very exact and the results may not be broadly applied to other teaching contexts.

5. Conclusion

English reading is an important basic skills course for lower-grade students majoring in English at colleges and universities. It comprehensively cultivates students’ basic English language skills and lays a solid foundation for their study in senior grades and beyond. To achieve the teaching objectives of strengthening students’ autonomous learning ability through English reading, comprehensively improving their comprehensive English application ability, and cultivating new talents meeting the needs of society and the country, it is necessary to change the original teaching concepts and forms, reform traditional teaching methods and means, and construct an English reading teaching system centered on learners, aimed at cultivating language application ability, guided by learning outcomes, and supported by modern information technology. The OBE theory adopted in

this study fully focuses on students' learning processes, adheres to outcome orientation and social needs as the goal, fully mobilizes students' enthusiasm and various resources in the learning process, and truly realizes the transformation from "teacher teaching" to "student learning".

Practices constitute a vital component of English language teaching, serving as both an extension and complement to classroom instruction. English reading pedagogy enabled by modern information technology honors students' individual differences, leveraging diversified and tiered practice to provide learners with multifaceted cognitive and learning pathways. Through meticulous organization and planning, it assists students in actively constructing meaningful contexts, empowering each learner to identify a suitable learning channel, unleash personal potential, and not only achieve language learning objectives but also foster the continuous development of multiple intelligences—aligning with the goals of quality-oriented and lifelong education.

The aforementioned data fully illustrate students' shifts in behavioral, cognitive, and emotional engagement from pre-class to post-class phases (i.e., before and after practice instruction), as well as their gains in knowledge, skills, cognition, and affect following practice teaching. Throughout the research, scholars conduct iterative validation, continuously reflect on findings, and feed insights back into instructional design to refine and verify objectives, curricula, activities, and evaluation mechanisms. Empirical evidence has solidified the guiding role of OBE theory in English education, prompting increased attention from educators and learners toward information technology. Through scientific and validated research methodologies, this study has explored and confirmed practice teaching frameworks, models, activities, and assessment approaches tailored to English major reading courses—ultimately distilling effective principles and pathways for practice instruction.

Funding

"Research on the Practical Teaching Path of Basic Reading Course for English Majors Oriented by Outcome-based Education theory under the Background of Informatization", a teaching innovation project of Shanxi Province in 2024 for higher education institutions.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

References

- Astin, A. W. (1984). Student Involvement: A Developmental Theory for Higher Education. *Journal of College Student Personnel*, 25, 297-308.
- Bai, H. (2012). Learning Effect Evaluation: The Trend of the Development of Higher Education Evaluation in the United States. *Journal of Hebei Normal University (Education Science Edition)*, 14, 26-31.

- Ewell, P. T. (2001). *Accreditation and Student Learning Outcomes: A Proposed Point of Departure* (p. 5). Council for Higher Education Accreditation.
- Fredricks, J. A., Blumenfeld, P. C., & Paris, A. H. (2004). School Engagement: Potential of the Concept, State of the Evidence. *Review of Educational Research, 74*, 59-109. <https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543074001059>
- Ing, M., & Victorino, C. (2016). Differences in Classroom Engagement of Asian American Engineering Students. *Journal of Engineering Education, 105*, 431-451. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jee.20126>
- Kong, Q. P. (2003). *Educational Research Methods*. Educational Science Press.
- Li, Z. Y. (2014). Analysis of the Outcome-Based Education Concept of Professional Accreditation in Engineering Education. *Higher Education in China, No. 17*, 7-10.
- National Foreign Language and Literature Major Teaching Advisory Board of Higher Education under the Ministry of Education & Teaching Advisory Board for Undergraduate Programs in English Language and Literature (2020). *The Teaching Guide for Foreign Languages and Literature Undergraduate Majors in Colleges and Universities (Part I): English Majors*. Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press.
- National Teaching Advisory Board of Higher Education under the Ministry of Education (2018). *National Quality Criteria for Undergraduate Teaching (Part I)*. Higher Education Press.
- Spady, W. G. (1981). *Outcome-Based Instructional Management: A Sociological Perspective*. National Institute of Education.
- Trowler, V., & Trowler, P. (2010). Student Engagement Evidence Summary. Higher Education Academy.
- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2007). *Quality Assurance and Accreditation: A Glossary of Basic Terms and Definition*.
- Venkatesh, V., Morris, M. G., Davis, G. B., & Davis, F. D. (1979). User Acceptance of Information Technology: Toward a Unified View1. *MIS Quarterly, 27*, 425-478. <https://doi.org/10.2307/30036540>
- Zhang, W. Z., & Sun, Y. Z. (2023). Analysis of the Current Situation of Core Course Module Construction for Foreign Language Majors—Based on the First Batch of Countries Investigation on the Construction Points of First-Class Undergraduate Programs. *Foreign Languages in China, 20*, 11-16.