"Telling Contemporary Chinese Stories Well": OBE-Oriented Teaching Design for College English

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Abstract: Against the backdrop of China's national development strategies and the construction of cultural confidence in the new era, the college English course undertakes a new mission of the times: cultivating students' ability to effectively tell contemporary Chinese stories in English. Based on the concept of outcome-based education, this paper constructs a teaching design framework for Chinese college English with the core goal of "telling contemporary Chinese stories well." It conducts systematic design from four core links—teaching objectives, teaching content, teaching implementation, and evaluation feedback—aiming to realize the organic integration of knowledge impartment, ability cultivation, and value guidance. This study provides a path reference for cultivating talents in the new era who possess cross-cultural communication competence and patriotism.

Keywords: Telling Chinese stories well; College English; Outcome-based education; Teaching design; Cross-cultural communication

1. Introduction

With China's growing global engagement, the mission of "telling Chinese stories well" has become an imperative in Chinese higher education. College English, as a fundamental course with extensive reach, is uniquely positioned to cultivate students' capacity for effective cross-cultural communication [1]. This paper proposes a teaching design framework grounded in the principles of outcome-based education (OBE), which adopts a "reverse design" approach to systematically align learning outcomes, instructional content, teaching activities, and evaluation mechanisms [2]. The framework is structured around a closed-loop process of "objective definition → content design → activity implementation → evaluation and improvement," ensuring the integrated development of linguistic proficiency, cultural competence, and narrative ability.

2. Inherent compatibility between OBE and "telling contemporary Chinese stories well"

The core of the OBE concept lies in "reverse design" and "student-centered outcome orientation," which is highly compatible with the teaching goal of "telling contemporary Chinese stories well" in terms of objective setting, implementation logic, and evaluation orientation [2].

2.1. Clarity of objectives

OBE requires that final learning outcomes be clear, specific, and measurable, rather than vague and abstract [2]. This clarity of objectives avoids the disconnection between "cultural communication" and "language teaching" in traditional teaching and provides a clear direction for the design of teaching activities.

2.2. Student-centeredness

OBE focuses on students' "ability to apply knowledge" rather than "mastery of theoretical knowledge" [2]. In the context of "telling Chinese stories well," students are no longer passive recipients of language knowledge but active narrators and cultural envoys. OBE guides teaching design to revolve around activating students' subjectivity: for example, by designing tasks such as "interviewing elders to compile English stories of local intangible cultural heritage" or "creating English short videos introducing Chinese scientific and technological innovations," students are encouraged to actively integrate language skills with cultural content, and gradually form the ability to tell stories independently. This student-centered logic is consistent with the essence of cross-cultural communication, which emphasizes "contextualized application" rather than "decontextualized language drills."

2.3. Measurability of outcomes

OBE requires that learning outcomes be evaluated through observable and verifiable behavioral performances [2]. The ability to "tell stories well" is not an abstract quality, but can be reflected through specific works and behaviors—such as written essays, oral speeches, multimedia videos, and simulated cross-cultural dialogues. For example, the quality of a student's English speech on "Yunnan Coffee Going Global" can be evaluated from three dimensions: language accuracy (e.g., correct use of terms such as "export volume" and "brand building"), cultural integrity (e.g., whether the integration of Chinese planting technology and international market demand is explained), and communication effectiveness (e.g., whether the logic is clear and the audience's interest is aroused). This measurability provides a basis for the construction of a diversified evaluation system, and avoids the one-sidedness of traditional "paper-and-pencil tests" that only focus on students' level of grammar and vocabulary [3].

2.4. Dynamic adjustment

OBE emphasizes the "closed-loop optimization" of teaching—collecting data on students' outcome achievement through evaluation, and dynamically adjusting teaching content and methods to solve existing problems [4]. The cultivation of the ability to "tell Chinese stories well" is a progressive process: students first master basic vocabulary and sentence patterns related to Chinese topics, then learn to interpret cultural connotations, and finally adapt to different cross-cultural communication scenarios. This gradual improvement requires continuous adjustment of teaching difficulty and task design based on students' actual performance. For example, if students struggle to explain cultural logic in English, teachers can add special training on some "cultural interpretation sentence patterns" (e.g., "The reason why... reflects... is that...") to help students break

through this bottleneck.

3. OBE-based teaching design framework for "telling contemporary Chinese stories well"

Based on the "reverse design" principle of OBE, this teaching design framework takes "defining final learning outcomes" as the starting point, and designs in reverse the teaching content, implementation processes, and evaluation systems. The framework includes four core links, forming a closed loop of "outcome setting → content design → activity implementation → evaluation improvement."

3.1. Defining final learning outcomes

The foundation of this OBE framework lies in the explicit definition of final learning outcomes, organized across three interconnected dimensions: knowledge, ability, and literacy. In the knowledge dimension, students are expected to master core vocabulary and discourse related to contemporary China—such as "poverty alleviation," "ecological civilization," and "intangible cultural heritage"—along with their accurate and contextually appropriate English expressions. The ability dimension emphasizes practical application, encompassing four key competencies: understanding and decoding diverse China-related narratives, transforming Chinese source materials into culturally accessible English forms, expressing and communicating ideas effectively across multimedia platforms, and responding critically to questions or misunderstandings about China. The literacy dimension focuses on fostering cultural confidence, intercultural empathy, and a global outlook, enabling students to engage in cross-cultural dialogue with both assurance and openness.

3.2. Thematic teaching modules and task design

To achieve these outcomes, the traditional college English curriculum is reorganized into four thematic modules: China's Development Story, Cultural Story, Technological Story, and Stories of Daily Life. Each module is supported by a progression of task-driven activities tailored to varying levels of complexity [5]. Primary tasks concentrate on building language foundations through vocabulary and pattern drills. Intermediate tasks shift toward contextual application, such as writing short articles or delivering brief presentations on topics like mobile payment or traditional festivals. Advanced tasks simulate real-world cross-cultural scenarios—for instance, organizing a simulated press conference on poverty alleviation or producing and publishing English short videos about urban change. This tiered structure facilitates gradual skill development, from basic mastery to creative and collaborative storytelling.

3.3. Implementation of the three-stage teaching model: The case of "Yunnan Coffee Going Global"

This framework adopts a three-stage teaching model of "Input–Internalization–Output" to translate instructional design into concrete classroom practice. Using the unit "Yunnan Coffee Going Global" from the "China's Development Stories" module as an example:

The pre-class input stage focuses on providing students with foundational knowledge and background information. The teacher releases a "thematic task package" via an online teaching platform (e.g., Learning Pass App). This package includes: a case text sourced from China Daily, a core vocabulary list (e.g., "specialty coffee, export volume, brand building"), and guiding questions. Students, organized into groups of 4–5, read the materials, look up vocabulary, search for supplementary information (e.g., current export volumes of Yunnan

coffee), and collaboratively complete a "Story Element Form" detailing time, location, characters, conflicts, and achievements. By reviewing these forms, the teacher gauges preparation levels and adjusts the in-class focus accordingly.

The in-class internalization stage is central to deepening understanding through interaction and fostering the integration of language knowledge and cultural content. This stage comprises three interactive segments (**Table 1**).

Table 1. Three interactive segments in the in-class internalization stage

Segments	Explanation
Cultural decoding	The teacher guides students in analyzing the "cultural and economic logic" behind the case—for instance, "Why did Yunnan coffee choose to blend Chinese planting techniques with international tastes? How does this reflect the development concept of 'opening up and cooperation'?" A group debate on topics like "Should local products prioritize preserving traditional characteristics or adapting to international markets?" is organized to deepen understanding of the story's cultural connotations.
Language polishing	The teacher focuses on high-frequency sentence patterns essential for "describing development achievements" and "analyzing problem-solving strategies." Typical errors from the pre-class forms are displayed for collective correction, followed by pattern-drill exercises where students apply these structures to local development cases.
Communicative simulation	The teacher sets up an authentic cross-cultural scenario: "A group of foreign coffee merchants is visiting Yunnan. You need to introduce the advantages of Yunnan coffee to them and persuade them to cooperate." Students engage in role-playing within their groups. The teacher provides real-time feedback, focusing on the "clarity of narrative logic," "language accuracy," and "effective highlighting of cultural advantages."

The post-class output stage aims to assess students' ability to independently tell Chinese stories and generate tangible learning outcomes. The teacher assigns "Personalized Chinese Story Projects," where students choose a theme and an output format. All works are uploaded to a "Chinese Story Student Sharing Platform," where peers evaluate them using a three-dimensional scoring rubric (**Table 2**) [3]. The teacher selects outstanding works to be showcased during the monthly class presentation, fostering a sense of achievement and encouraging authentic language use. Students reflect on feedback, revise their work, and set goals for future projects, promoting ownership of learning and continuous improvement through iterative practice.

Table 2. Scoring rubric for summative evaluation task (English speech)

Dimension	Excellent (4 points)	Good (3 points)	Satisfactory (2 points)	Unsatisfactory (1 point)
Language accuracy	No grammatical errors; accurate terminology; authentic expression	Occasional grammatical errors; basically accurate terminology	Frequent grammatical errors; occasional misuse of terminology	Frequent grammatical errors; confusing terminology
Cultural integrity	Complete interpretation of cultural logic behind the story; no misunderstandings	Able to interpret cultural connotations; occasional omissions of details	Only mention cultural elements; lack in-depth interpretation	Incorrect cultural interpretation; existing misunderstandings
Communication appeal	Clear logic; strong interaction; able to attract audience interest	Relatively clear logic; certain interactivity	Basically clear logic; weak interactivity	Confusing logic; no interactivity; hard for audience to understand

3.4. Diversified evaluation and support systems

A diversified evaluation system combining formative and summative assessments should be used by teachers to monitor and support student progress. Formative evaluation (60% of the total score) tracks student performance across preparatory, in-class, and post-class activities, with instructors providing specific, timely feedback.

Summative evaluation (40%) consists of a culminating task—such as an essay combined with an English speech—assessed via a detailed rubric that measures language accuracy, cultural integrity, and communicative appeal [6]. The evaluation process incorporates multiple perspectives, including teacher, peer, and self-assessment, fostering a culture of reflective learning. Moreover, evaluation data are used diagnostically to identify common challenges and refine instructional methods.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study employs the OBE teaching concept by having students narrate contemporary Chinese stories. In specific teaching practice, teachers have established a multi-language activity system that promotes perception through listening, thinking through reading, practice through speaking, debate through writing, and analysis through translation, organically integrating classroom sub-tasks with language skills. It creates humanistic, authentic, and diverse unit output projects, implements a reverse curriculum design centered on output, and determines teaching based on learning [7]. The approach progresses methodically and cohesively, aiming to guide students to adopt an active and practical approach to foreign language learning. The research design is not a rigid form of direct teaching and indoctrination but rather allows students to experience and discover independently throughout the learning process. In the future, we will continue to keep improving and further explore educational methods that can effectively cultivate disseminators of the achievements of China and Chinese culture.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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