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THE APPLICATION OF SCHEMA THEORY IN COMPREHENSIVE ENGLISH READING TEACHING FROM THE OBE PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT
The outcome-based-education (OBE) educational philosophy aims to achieve results and puts students first. It is an educational philosophy that adopts a reverse thinking approach to the curriculum system. Schema is a knowledge structure that exists in memory. The effective activation of schemata can stimulate learners' enthusiasm and initiative. Teachers apply schema theory to guide comprehensive English reading teaching, which plays an important role in assisting students in constructing, activating, and improving language schemata, content schemata, and formal schemata.
KEYWORDS: *OBE; Schema Theory; Comprehensive English Reading*

I. INTRODUCTION

According to the revised 2023 edition of the requirements of the talent cultivation plan of the School of Foreign Studies at Zhaoqing University, the English major should focus on cultivating high moral standards, willingness to teach, solid knowledge of English subjects, familiarity with Chinese and foreign cultural knowledge, good English application ability, strong English teaching ability, and certain teaching and research ability, as well as cross-cultural ability, self-learning ability, critical thinking ability, and innovative consciousness. OBE (Outcome Based Education) educational philosophy [1] aims to achieve results and puts students first. It emphasizes that the allocation of educational resources and all teaching activities (including teaching design, teaching steps, and teaching reflection) should closely focus on students' expected learning outcomes and ability development, reflecting students' subjectivity and teachers' leadership.

According to the spirit of the *National Medium - and Long Term Education Reform and Development Plan Outline (2010-2020)* and *Several Opinions on Improving the Quality of Higher Education in an All round Way*, the comprehensive English curriculum should aim to cultivate students' comprehensive training in five skills: listening, speaking, reading, writing, and translation. The overall task is to enhance students' humanistic literacy and comprehensive quality, so that students can establish correct values and improve their cross-cultural communication skills in the process of understanding themselves, others, and the world. College comprehensive English courses should take the guidance of the OBE concept as an opportunity to fully mobilize students' enthusiasm and initiative in learning English, and improve their basic language skills such as listening, speaking, reading, writing, and translation through the correct use of schema theory.

The author found many problems in various aspects such as listening, speaking, reading, writing, and translation in the comprehensive English course through auditing and personal teaching practice. Firstly, students' listening ability is insufficient, and they feel scared when talking about "listening"; In the preparation work required for students to give presentations on a certain topic with the aim of improving their English speaking skills, some students are not well prepared or even do not prepare, resulting in classroom oral presentations becoming rote reading of PPT; The preview of Reading I has basically become a vocabulary and grammar lesson. Although students have made a lot of annotations and marks in the book, they only stay at a low-level reading level of words and sentences. They have not formed a complete framework for the overall structure or paragraph logic of the article, nor have they done a good job in accumulating cultural background knowledge; There hasn't been much progress in English writing. Some students don't make drafts at all and write essays like a journal, while others may have a brief outline but use stiff and awkward vocabulary, make grammar errors, and logically confused sentences, let alone use rhetorical devices; In terms of translation, even if the translation instruction is from Chinese to English, due to the lack of Chinese knowledge and background of the translator (the native speaker of Chinese), the principle of "faithfulness" cannot be satisfied. Meeting the demands of "expressiveness" and "elegance" in translating will be an empty talk. The above-mentioned issues are not isolated cases, and need to be addressed urgently. The article hopes to draw on schema theory to improve the teaching status of comprehensive English.

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II SCHEMA THEORY AND LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of schema [2] can be traced back to Plato and Aristotle, but Kant [3] is generally considered the first person to define schema as an "organizational structure" that regulates how we view and interpret the world [4]. The research on memory by British experimental psychologist Bartlett[5] in the 1930s is considered a classic case on which schema theory is based. He believes that schema is a way for people to understand the world, and schema is an active organizational function of experience or knowledge, which must be an abstract system formed by the integration of individual elements, rather than simply listing them. Piaget [6] introduced schemas into the field of psychology to study cognitive development in children "Development is explained as a continuous dialectics, in which an individual either absorbs new experiences consistent with existing schemata, or adapts schemata to his or her experiences." Piaget explained the process of schema construction in children's cognitive world using schema, assimilation, adaptation, and balance. Simply put, in order to acquire new knowledge and grow, organisms must balance adaptation and assimilation. Assimilation maintains the integrity of existing schema structures by integrating or transferring new information to old schemata (schemata undergo quantitative changes); Conformity is the adjustment made by organisms to adapt to new environments by creating new patterns or changing the structure of existing patterns (qualitative change). In the process of children's development (acquiring new knowledge), if there is only assimilation without adaptation, it will lead to an imbalance between assimilation and adaptation, and there will be no new schema generated, which will result in the inability to complete the task of development; Another danger is that when there are errors in the existing schema and the organism only adopts assimilation strategies in the process of interacting with the external world, the existing schema will repeatedly make mistakes, causing irreversible situations. If one only adapts to differentiation and constantly constructs countless schemata without systematically summarizing and generalizing the characteristics of the object, these schemata will become scattered and disorderly piles, which will also cause trouble for the organism and prevent it from obtaining true meaning of "development". In the 1980s, American AI expert Rumelhart [7] and others supplemented the previous schema theory and defined schema as "a group of 'interacting knowledge structures' stored in long-term memory in hierarchical form". Piaget and Rumelhart et al. summarized that the basic characteristics of schemata are: the presence of variables; Internesting between schemata; Schema representation of knowledge at all levels of abstraction; Schema is an active cognitive structure. Rumelhart [7] also introduced schema theory into reading instruction. He divided schemata into language schema, content schema, and form schema. If students are familiar with the thematic content and cultural background knowledge of the text they are reading, they possess a content schema; If students understand the genre characteristics of the text, the logical framework between paragraphs, and the overall structure, they will possess formal schema; If students are proficient in vocabulary, sentences, grammar, rhetoric, and other knowledge in the text, they will have language schema. In this way, students are "innate" prepared to better understand the reading content. The absence of any of the above schemata will lead to reading comprehension defects. Carrell [8] believes that "students' apparent reading problems may be due to insufficient background knowledge [content, form, and language], and even if students may have sufficient schemata, they may still be unable to understand the text if these schemata are not activated. Of course, even under the condition of schema activation, Aebersell&Field [9:41] cautioned that "if the topic... exceeds [students'] experience or knowledge base, they will drift in the unknown ocean". This poses new challenges for universities in terms of professional settings, curriculum reform, discipline construction, and textbook selection, as well as for frontline teachers in terms of lesson preparation, student preparation, self preparation, classroom explanation, homework assignment, and assessment evaluation. Teachers should optimize learning content (stimuli) as much as possible based on a comprehensive understanding of students' knowledge backgrounds, in order to better activate students' existing schemata, achieve a balance between existing schema and stimuli in the interactive dynamics of assimilation and adaptation, and help students complete the task of acquiring new knowledge.

The research on schema theory in China began in the 1980s. After searching for the topic of "schema theory" on the CNKI（China National Knowledge Infrastructure）platform, 9273 results were found. The earliest article was Chapter 5 of *Elementary Psychology* by Holland-an American author , translated by Shaji WuJie in 1983 and titled *A Theory of Learning*. To obtain the literature on using schema theory to guide foreign language teaching in China, more efforts were put in such as inputting "schema theory+foreign language teaching" in the topic column and 1417 results were found. Among them, the earliest application of schema theory to foreign language teaching was *Schema Theory and Foreign Language Reading Teaching* by Lou Lijun, which was published in the Journal of Shantou University in 1993. In order to narrow down the search scope, the input content－"Schema Theory+Foreign Language Teaching"in the topic bar remains unchanged. In the source category, after clicking and picking CSSCI, CSCD, and AMI, and only 70 results were found. The following text provides a brief review of the literature on schema theory in core journals. Zheng Jing [10] studied first-year students majoring in English and non-English at two universities in Shanghai, and based on reading training experiments, concluded that if teachers engage in more reading training activities that activate schemata, students' schema storage, extraction, and processing abilities can be improved. Yang Yuan and Xu Bing [11] verified the effectiveness of schema theory and task-based teaching method through teaching experiments, indicating that schema theory is applicable to Japanese reading teaching and helps improve students' reading comprehension ability and language logical thinking ability. Yang Yang [12] takes Vietnamese translation teaching practice as an example and proposes the necessity of combining language schema, formal schema, content schema, and cultural schema in translation teaching activities to enhance the translation ability of non lingua-franca learners in universities. Liu Fengxiang [13] and Zhang Yanyan [14] applied schema theory to oral training, demonstrating the feasibility and effectiveness of schema theory in improving English oral training, and providing relevant strategies for teaching practice. Long

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Zaibo and Wang Yuqi [15] introduced schema theory into independent college English listening teaching, and verified the effectiveness of schema theory through experimental sample analysis. They proposed a "six-step teaching model" for independent college English listening. Lv Peichen[16] reiterated the importance of schema theory in foreign language teaching practice. Teachers should start from the perspective of activating, enriching, and constructing new cultural schemata to help students improve their listening comprehension and reduce listening barriers. Ma Yumei [17] starts from a micro perspective and focuses on English vocabulary teaching in language schema theory, improving the efficiency of foreign language vocabulary teaching by establishing various connections. The application research of schema theory is not limited to the higher education stage, and there are also studies on the guiding significance of schema theory in middle school English reading and writing in the basic education stage [18] [19] [20].

After a brief literature review of domestic core journal literature, the following points can be drawn: firstly, although the history of applying schema theory to foreign language teaching practice in China is only about 30 years, the research scope is wide and the field is broad. In terms of curriculum, most of the research focuses on the application of schema theory in foreign language reading teaching, and some articles also discuss the teaching guidance significance of schema theory for foreign language listening, speaking, and writing. In terms of language, schema theory is mainly applied to the study of English language, but it does not exclude the study of minor languages such as Japanese and Vietnamese; Secondly, there are still limited articles on the application of core schema theory in foreign language teaching practice, and there is still a lot of room for exploration. Among the 1417 articles on foreign language teaching explored under the theme of "schema theory+foreign language teaching", core journals only account for about 5%.

III APPLICATION AND EXPLORATION OF SCHEMA THEORY IN COMPREHENSIVE ENGLISH COURSE

The comprehensive English course of the English major at Zhaoqing University applies the newly compiled English curriculum edited by Mei Deming [21]. The layout of each unit in the second volume of the student book is composed of six parts, namely, language structure, dialogue,listening in & speaking out，Reading I &Reading II，guided writing, interaction activities. This includes training in basic language skills such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The compilation of textbooks follows the following five principles. One is the principle of integrating language knowledge, language skills, emotional attitudes, learning strategies, and cultural awareness; The second principle is to use language and content that conform to the cognitive laws of college students and stimulate their interest in learning; Thirdly, importance is attached to the perception and experience of language knowledge, the acquisition and processing of language information, the coordination of input and output, and the reasonable reflection of the reproduction rate of language knowledge. Fourthly, rich cultural content from both Chinese and foreign cultures is provided to cultivate students' cross-cultural communication skills. Lastly, in terms of material selection, there is a wide range of genres, with humanities and social sciences as the main focus, and natural sciences as a supplement. The proportion of novels, poems, essays, biographies, etc. is balanced. Taking the reading section of Unit 6 in Comprehensive English Volume 2 as an example, this paper explores the practical application of content schema, structural schema, and language schema in the comprehensive English curriculum, focusing on the listening, speaking, reading, and writing aspects of the five principles and unit layout mentioned above.

1. Schema Construction in the Pre-Reading Section

The pre-reading section prepares a schema for formal reading. The reading material for this unit is A Virtue Called Devotion. The teacher guides students to understand that the topic of the text is Virtue Devotion through the interpretation of the topic; visually seeing the word 'devotion' can activate the existing conceptual and categorical schemata of the mind towards the word 'devotion'. Is it 'loyalty' or 'dedication'? Is it a romantic relationship, a family relationship, a career, a nation, or even a religion? Schema, as a cognitive structure, can guide the behavior of the subject. Students can identify their differences by consulting materials, making schema concepts clearer. At the same time, through assimilation, they can integrate the acquired new knowledge into existing schemata, making the content of existing schemata richer and more complete. It is also possible to activate situational schemata and generate expectations for new knowledge, such as recalling whether one has previously studied articles on similar topics. Next, consider a question - 'What might I read?' to further speculate on the content of the article. Is it to help readers interpret the meaning of "devotion" or to use examples to tell a story to help readers understand the true meaning of a specific devotion category?! Students can even expect the genre of the text to be expository, narrative, or argumentative?!

Teachers can guide students to construct content and structural schemata based on post-class questions. The first post-class question in Lesson A Virtue Called Motivation is "In what physical condition is the writer's grandmother?" It can be inferred that the answer to this question is related to physical condition. Students can name it as Content Schema 1: Physical Condition of Grandmother. Since the second question is "Why can the writer's family hard put up with Grandmother?", it can be inferred that this question revolves around "causal relationships - the reasons why family members cannot tolerate their grandmother". It can be named Content Schema 2: Reason. Following this line of thinking, the third content schema, the fourth content schema, and so on can be derived. Actually, the eight questions after class revolve around what, why, and how. What refers to the physical and mental condition of the grandmother and issues with the nursing home (questions 1, 3, and 4), the decisions made by the mother (question 5), and the author's views on caring for the elderly (question 7) (question 8 is an open-ended question). The “Why” question refers to the reason

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why family members cannot tolerate their grandmother (question 2). “How” refers to how different societies treat the elderly differently (Question 6). What, why, and how can be connected together to form the framework structure of the entire problem. Both structural and content schemata have been formed.

Common sense tells us that objects with obvious features are more likely to be noticed by organisms, and therefore more likely to be remembered by organisms and stored in the brain to form patterns. For example, students with more movements are more likely to attract the teacher's attention in class; Colored text is more likely to attract readers' attention than other mundane text. During the language schema creation stage, teachers can guide students to consciously pay attention to whether the reading material includes photos, maps, or charts? Is there a list of key terms and definitions? Are there any important words in bold, italic, or underlined? The first to sixth paragraphs of text A Virtue Called Devotion all contain content marked in blue font. There are ten words marked with superscripts in the upper right corner from the first to the sixth paragraph, and some words (her and my in the fourth paragraph) are written in italics. These words and sentences with obvious special processing methods are the key and difficult knowledge points that need to be paid attention to when interpreting the text. The words' put up with 'and' live with 'in blue font in the first paragraph are a group of synonyms; The words' room 'in the second paragraph,' divorced 'in the third paragraph, and' heartless' in the fifth paragraph are all new vocabulary that needs to be mastered; words of “inexpensive” and “unappealing ”are knowledge points that carry negative prefixes; The sentence structure in the blue font in the fourth paragraph is very symmetrical, consisting of a subject plus predicate plus adverbial (SVA) structure. The symmetry of the structure can better serve as a contrast in semantics. Faced with the fact that my grandmother needs to be taken care of in her old age, other family members are deliberately avoiding the obligation to support the elderly, while my mother is different and actively proposes to take on the responsibility of supporting my grandmother.

The establishment of the above structural schema, content schema, and language schema provides conditions for the effective development of formal reading. Each constructed schema acts as a bridge connecting the organism and external stimuli (people, events, environment, etc.). In reading activities, when the schema is activated, the organism's reading comprehension will be smoother and knowledge acquisition will become possible.

2. Schema Activation in Text Reading

After creating the schema, it is necessary to activate the schema. Carrell [22] (1981) argues that "All valid cognitive schemata of the reader must be activated in order for the text to be understood." Firstly, from the perspective of lexical schemata, the article mentions that the grandmother's age is ninety-four. If a student is a vocabulary sensitive learner and sees the word 'ninety-four', 'the reader's visual schema will be immediately activated, and reading comprehension is a process of interaction between various levels of schemata [25]. After the visual feature schema is activated, it will automatically activate language schema such as words, semantics, grammar, and strategic schema for vocabulary memory. The understanding of strategic approaches to problem-solving through strategic schemata is about the psychological structure of achieving specific goals or outcomes, including cognitive patterns for selecting and implementing behavioral strategies. These schemata influence our decision-making and behavioral choices. Under the guidance of strategic schemata, students will consciously search for age-related vocabulary. Ninety four is a term selected by students, and the implemented strategy can be associative strategy. Students associate the professional terms for different age groups in Chinese, namely 六十花甲，七十古稀，八十耄耋，九十鲐背，期颐之年. Students find their corresponding English words under the guidance of the strategic schema, namely: sexagenarian, septuagenarian, octogenarian, nonagenarian, and centenarian. By activating the strategic schema, searching for vocabulary, and a series of cognitive activities and behaviors, the subject further enriches its vocabulary schema, improves its knowledge structure, and achieves twice the result with half the effort. This strategy is also applicable to the learning and consolidation of grammar knowledge points. The last two sentences of this paragraph are about the grammar knowledge points of adverbial clauses of result, which can activate students' schema of other adverbial clauses. The memorization and mastery of clauses such as adverbial clause of time, adverbial clause of place, adverbial clause of reason, adverbial clause of comparison, adverbial clause of manner, adverbial clause of concession, etc., is indeed one of the compulsory contents in the junior grades of English majors. The first paragraph of Text A Virtue Called Devotion introduces the grandmother's age and physical condition with significant hearing loss. By using two symmetrical and parallel subordinate compound sentences, the changes in the grandmother's thoughts and mentality after aging are highlighted, and the reader's impression of the characteristics of grandmother's aging is deepened: grandma has become demanding and pessimistic due to ageing. This structure can also activate existing schema structures related to the construction of balanced sentences.

The topic of the text (new stimulus) is respecting and loving the elderly. In the Chinese context, Chinese students are naturally familiar with the traditional Chinese virtue of respecting the elderly and loving the young, that is, their existing schema is the cognition of "respecting the elderly and loving the young". Due to the strong correlation between reading materials and existing schemata, existing schemata are easily activated. Under the premise of activating existing schemata, students only need to adopt assimilation strategies, that is, integrating new knowledge (specific information elements) into existing schemata. Existing schemata are richer in content, and students can complete the learning and understanding of new knowledge.

According to experience (existing patterns), the topic sentence is usually located at the beginning or end of each paragraph. Students guide their behavior based on existing schemata by identifying the central sentence of each paragraph to infer its general meaning.

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However,this practice is just a general rule without considering exceptional cases. Because some topic sentences appear explicitly or implicitly in the sentence, students need to summarize and refine them. For example, the first sentences of the fourth and fifth paragraphs are the central sentences of their respective paragraphs, which are "Grandma would not end up in a nursing home." and "In many lands, the elderly are treated respectfully as the head of the household." The last part is a story told by the mother, with the aim of conveying the importance of filial piety through words and deeds. And this gist does not appear directly at the beginning of the paragraph or as a summary at the end, but requires readers to summarize and generalize by themselves. In this case, there are two situations: one is to change the structure of the existing schema to reconstruct a new one, and the other is to keep the existing schema unchanged and reconstruct a completely new schema. Both of these situations involve the process of existing schemata adapting to new knowledge.

3. **Perfection of the Schema after Reading the Text**

After schema activation, there is an interactive process with new information. When an existing schema undergoes structural changes based on new information, which is a process accommodation. However, in other cases, assimilation occurs, during which the existing knowledge influences new information to better adapt to our existing information, thereby reducing the likelihood of schema changes [26]. Whether it is adaptation or assimilation, it is not the end of the subject's understanding of the world, but rather a process of mutual adjustment and adaptation between existing schemata and new knowledge. In this process, the content of the schema is constantly enriched and improved, laying the foundation for the next cognitive activity. The reading schema includes language schema, content schema, and structural schema, which can be consolidated and improved after class. Teachers can assign homework after class to consolidate language knowledge points. The questions of vocabulary match and word explanation in English are nothing less than good exercises. By doing exercises, the understanding and application of word meanings are more thorough and strengthened, and language patterns enhanced. The vocabulary questions in the workbook are designed for this purpose. Of course, there are various types of reading materials, and in order to quickly activate the patterns in memory while reading, it is necessary to read a large number of articles of different genres and contents. If students feel interested in political events, the Washington Post and NY Times are two good picks. CNBC and Wall Street Journal provide finance news. Essays, expository texts, and narrative texts should be read, as well as novels, science fiction, and technology related articles. The wider the field of exploration, the easier it is to activate existing patterns and achieve proficiency when reading. Otherwise, even if there are existing schemata, due to unfamiliarity with the content or genre of the reading material, the schema cannot be activated, and reading comprehension will be greatly compromised, resulting in twice the effort and half the result.

IV SUMMARY

Schema theory breaks with the tradition of passive teaching reading articles first and then finding answers. By creating schemata before reading, it creates conditions for students to activate schemata during formal reading, allowing them to read the text with purpose and achieve efficient reading. Schema theory has played an important role in fully mobilizing students' initiative in autonomous reading, reflecting the concept of "prioritizing students guided by instructors". Learning goals are more clear, and learning strategies are more targeted. Schema theory is a concrete application of the OBE concept, which enables students to have a basic grasp of the framework, main idea, and key and difficult knowledge of an article, preparing them for formal reading. At present, schema theory is mainly applied in higher education, and there is still much room for exploration in its guiding significance for primary and secondary education. This article takes the text A Virtue Called Devotion as an example, combined with the author's teaching practice, to explore the feasibility of the OBE theory in the reading section of Comprehensive English courses. Undeniably, schema theory also has its limitations. For example, countries where English is the native language already have inherent advantages in language schema, so when reading texts, the focus should be on activating content schema and structural schema. While In China, English is not the native language for students, and language schema, content schema, and structural schema are equally important. Moreover, students' language foundations vary greatly, and the importance and urgency of the three schemata need to be analyzed on a case by case basis, rather than being generalized.

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