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Exploration of Teaching Reforms in International Undergraduate Business Education under the OBE Concept: A Case Study of the "Managing People and Organisations" Course

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Abstract

This article, guided by the principles of Outcome-Based Education (OBE), explores its application and significance in undergraduate business education through the case study of my course teaching reform practices. My practical teaching experience reveals that applying the OBE concept in areas such as setting teaching objectives and designing evaluation systems, transforming teacher roles and employing diverse teaching methods, and enhancing student agency and establishing collaborative learning mechanisms can significantly improve teaching quality.

Keywords

Outcome-Based Education; Business Education; Managing People and Organisations; Teaching Reform.

1. Introduction

In the 1980s, the United States saw the emergence of the Outcome-Based Education (OBE) theory. This educational theory gradually spread to countries such as the United Kingdom, Canada, the Philippines, and Malaysia. Through continuous research and practical implementation, these countries have accumulated valuable insights and experiences, further advancing the theory within the educational community. China began to take an interest in OBE at the beginning of the 21st century. The three core elements of this theory—student-centeredness, outcome orientation, and continuous improvement—have transformed the traditional teacher-led classroom model, enhancing students' enthusiasm and initiative for self-directed learning. OBE theory requires teachers to assess students' current learning levels and abilities, then predict the competency levels students might achieve by graduation. Based on these predictions, teachers tailor their instruction to meet the needs of students at different levels, assigning appropriate tasks and plans to help them achieve the expected educational outcomes.

2. Current Issues in Undergraduate Business Education

2.1. Lack of Diversity in Course Design

Business courses primarily cover areas such as economics, finance, accounting, and management. Business students are generally characterized by active thinking and innovative ideas but often lack extensive social practice experience and have a limited understanding of business courses. Therefore, teachers need to design engaging and innovative course content that keeps pace with contemporary developments to stimulate students' interest, capture their attention, and encourage active thinking and interaction in the classroom, ultimately improving the quality of learning.

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However, in the current state of business course teaching, instructors tend to focus more on delivering theoretical knowledge in class. There is little analysis of students' backgrounds across different classes, and the same course often follows a uniform syllabus and teaching design. Furthermore, most teachers do not encourage students to independently preview or explore the modules they are interested in.

2.2. Rigid Talent Development Goals

Currently, universities adhere to a standardized national educational system for talent development, with four-year undergraduate education programs typically being finalized before students even begin their studies. However, the rapid evolution of contemporary society renders these fixed and outdated development plans increasingly disconnected from societal needs. Additionally, most institutions offer limited elective courses, failing to meet the diverse learning needs of students. This often results in graduates who possess skills that fall far short of the demands of the job market, leading to a scenario where graduation coincides with unemployment.

2.3. Traditional Mindset among Faculty

Business courses are generally highly specialized, and professionals in this field tend to develop a problem-solving approach heavily reliant on their specialized knowledge. As a result, many instructors of professional courses prefer to follow traditional "spoon-feeding" teaching methods, showing little inclination toward pedagogical reform and innovation. This significantly hinders the development and enhancement of students' independent learning abilities. Most business classrooms are still teacher-centered, with instruction guided by a rigid syllabus and teaching plan. The classroom atmosphere is often stagnant, with students passively absorbing rigid knowledge, leading to poor retention and understanding of key concepts. Over time, this can foster a sense of disengagement and aversion to learning among students. Yet, the demands of the modern era require business professionals not only to have a solid theoretical foundation but also to possess strong practical skills, exceptional innovative thinking, and a resilient curiosity-driven mindset.

2.4. Outdated Final Assessment Methods

Final assessments are a crucial component in evaluating learning outcomes, yet the methods employed in business courses are often overly simplistic. Many instructors rely on a combination of exam scores and attendance to determine final grades. This approach leads to scenarios where students maintain perfect attendance but fail to engage attentively in class or participate actively in discussions, resorting instead to cramming and rote memorization before exams. The lack of assessment methods that provide feedback on students' critical thinking, initiative, and creativity is overly narrow, resulting in students merely going through the motions without developing practical skills or innovative thinking. This approach also limits instructors' ability to adjust their teaching strategies and methods in response to students' actual learning progress and needs.

3. Characteristics of Undergraduate Business Education Incorporating the OBE Concept

Implementing teaching reforms based on the Outcome-Based Education (OBE) concept can optimize curriculum design, diversify teaching methods, emphasize student learning outcomes, and enhance student engagement, ultimately improving the quality and effectiveness of education. The advantages of OBE-based education are reflected in several key areas:

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3.1. Designing a Teaching System based on OBE Principles

The OBE theory emphasizes that teaching objectives should be outcome-oriented, with diversified final assessment methods and a comprehensive evaluation system in place.

First, a thorough analysis of students' current learning status is essential to set clear and realistic learning outcomes. Instructors need to understand the course objectives as well as the current knowledge level and abilities of their students. Based on this understanding, they can estimate the learning outcomes students should achieve by the end of the course. These outcomes should be practical, observable, recordable, and measurable. For example, in teaching the course "Managing People and Organizations," the educational goal is for students to grasp the fundamental theories of human resource management and apply these theories in practical situations, enabling them to analyze and assess management concepts in daily life. Instructors should be clear about this course objective and assess the current competency levels of their students.

Second, lesson plans should be designed with a focus on achieving the intended learning outcomes. Once these outcomes are defined, the lesson plan should be structured around them. In this context, instructors can plan to use a variety of teaching methods and classroom activities to help students achieve the anticipated learning outcomes. For instance, in the "Managing People and Organizations" course, the instructor could pre-record video lectures explaining key theoretical concepts, divide the content into manageable segments, and assign these as tasks that students with weaker foundations can study independently. Students who complete these tasks ahead of time could then move on to discussions and specialized research topics. This approach encourages students to summarize and analyze key concepts on their own, create mind maps, and independently consider post-class questions. The outcomes of this independent learning can be presented in various forms, such as written reports, oral presentations, or video sharing.

Finally, a comprehensive assessment of student learning outcomes at the end of the course is crucial. In this stage, instructors should evaluate students holistically, considering their knowledge, skills, and personal development through a variety of assessment methods. Final grades should reflect a combination of factors, including exam scores, presentation reports, practical project outcomes, group work, and class discussions. Moreover, the assessment criteria should be transparent, fair, and as accurate as possible, providing students with timely and equitable feedback and motivation. The results of these assessments can also help instructors refine and improve their lesson plans and teaching strategies.

3.2. The Shift in the Role of Teachers based on OBE Principles

The OBE concept requires teachers to transition from traditional knowledge transmitters to learning facilitators and inspirational leaders. In the modern era, where the internet is rapidly transforming education, the rise of online courses is inevitable. Therefore, both new and experienced teachers should embrace the internet and learn to effectively use online resources, such as educational videos, to extend students' learning beyond the confines of the 45-minute classroom session and the physical classroom itself.

For example, when teaching the course "Managing People and Organizations," I guide students in selecting interesting and relevant videos and case studies online for pre-class self-study. Students are encouraged to bring their questions to class, where we can collectively discuss and resolve them. This approach stimulates students' interest in pre-class learning and motivates them to showcase their learning outcomes in class. The process can even include competitive activities, such as quiz games, to ensure active participation from every student. In this context, the teacher assumes the role of an observer, a planner of learning steps, and ultimately, a problem-solver who helps clarify any remaining uncertainties.

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3.3. Diversification of Teaching Methods based on OBE Principles

In line with OBE educational principles, teachers should adopt a variety of teaching methods to meet the diverse needs of students. These methods may include group discussions, case studies, role-playing, quiz competitions, and hands-on practice. For instance, when teaching the course "Managing People and Organizations," a case study on "Huawei's Employee Performance Management" could be used. Students could be encouraged to engage in group discussions to analyze the underlying causes of employee performance and evaluate the pros and cons of related management strategies. Through in-class quiz competitions or online discussion forums, each student would have the opportunity to contribute ideas and engage critically with the content, fostering active participation and leaving a lasting impression of their thought process.

Additionally, teachers can tailor course designs to the individual learning needs and abilities of students. For those who have already mastered the foundational knowledge, more advanced topics can be introduced for self-study, with students later presenting their learning outcomes through reports or presentations. This approach ensures that all students are challenged at their appropriate level and remain actively engaged in the learning process.

3.4. Student Engagement in OBE-Based Teaching

The OBE philosophy emphasizes that students should be active participants in their learning, rather than passive recipients of knowledge delivered by the teacher. For example, when studying the course "Managing People and Organizations," instructors can assign group tasks that encourage students to actively engage in class discussions and case analyses. Students are also encouraged to apply the foundational concepts they learn to real-life scenarios, actively explore and identify issues, and seek out solutions independently. Questions such as "How does cultural diversity impact team management?", "How can employee engagement be ensured during organizational change?", and "How should conflicts among team members be managed?" are examples of the types of human resource management-related inquiries that students might explore.

By prompting students to ask questions, the teaching approach fosters active thinking and enhances learning outcomes through classroom interaction and dialogue with peers and instructors. This method not only strengthens students' confidence and critical thinking skills but also improves their ability to learn independently and solve problems effectively.

4. Practical Teaching Method Suggestions based on OBE Principles

4.1. Case-Based Teaching

Case-based teaching is an instructional method that uses real-world cases as a starting point for learning, involving detailed analysis, group discussions, and the application of lessons learned to other contexts. This method is particularly effective in courses like "Managing People and Organizations," where theoretical concepts are deeply intertwined with practical applications. For example, questions such as "How does Apple effectively motivate its team members?" or "How should College students develop effective communication skills?" are directly related to the principles of human resource management and organizational behavior, making them highly relevant to the course content.

Incorporating case studies into the curriculum allows students to engage with real-world scenarios, bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application. When instructors introduce and discuss these practical cases in class, they not only help students grasp the underlying economic and management theories but also encourage the development of critical skills such as observation, analysis, and problem-solving. For instance, by examining how Apple motivates its employees, students can explore the application of various motivation

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theories, assess the effectiveness of different strategies, and consider how these approaches might be adapted to different organizational contexts.

Moreover, classic and contemporary cases that resonate with students' experiences can significantly enhance their interest in the subject matter. When students see the relevance of what they are learning to their own lives and future careers, they are more likely to engage deeply with the material. This engagement can be likened to a dopamine release in the brain—sparking a sense of reward and motivation that drives active participation in class discussions and critical thinking.

Instructors can take this a step further by encouraging students to bring their own experiences and observations into the classroom. For example, students might be asked to identify a communication challenge they have faced in a group project and analyze it using the concepts discussed in class. This approach not only reinforces the learning objectives but also personalizes the educational experience, making it more meaningful and memorable.

Furthermore, case-based teaching encourages collaborative learning. Group discussions about case studies allow students to share diverse perspectives, debate different approaches, and collaboratively develop solutions to complex problems. This collaborative environment mirrors the realities of the workplace, where teamwork and communication are essential to success. Through these interactions, students learn to articulate their ideas clearly, listen to others' viewpoints, and refine their critical thinking skills-capabilities that are invaluable in any organizational setting.

In conclusion, the use of case studies in teaching "Managing People and Organizations" based on OBE principles fosters a more interactive, engaging, and practical learning experience. By integrating real-world examples into the curriculum, instructors can help students not only understand the theoretical foundations of management but also apply these concepts to solve real-life problems. This approach not only enhances students' academic performance but also prepares them to be effective, thoughtful leaders in their future careers.

4.2. Interactive Teaching

Interactive teaching refers to a pedagogical approach where students engage in active communication and interaction with the instructor and their peers during the learning process. In the context of the course "Managing People and Organizations," this method can significantly deepen students' understanding of foundational concepts. It goes beyond mere passive reception of information to ensure that students truly comprehend and can articulate their knowledge.

Enhancing Understanding Through Interaction.

Interactive teaching involves creating opportunities for students to explain concepts to others, not just internalize information themselves. When students are tasked with explaining their understanding of a topic to their classmates or responding to questions from the instructor, they demonstrate their grasp of the material on a deeper level. This process helps ensure that students not only know the facts but also understand the underlying principles and reasoning behind them. For example, in a class discussion on team motivation strategies, students might present their analysis of different motivational theories, answer questions from their peers, and discuss the practical implications of these theories in various organizational settings.

Utilizing Classroom and Online Platforms.

To foster interaction, instructors can incorporate various methods such as live classroom presentations or online video sharing. Allowing students to present their analyses, whether through in-person speeches or recorded videos shared on online platforms, provides them with a platform to showcase their understanding. These presentations can cover topics such as effective team management practices or case studies on organizational behavior. By doing so,

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students gain the opportunity to articulate their insights, receive feedback from both peers and the instructor, and engage in discussions that enrich their learning experience.

Fostering Mutual Understanding and Collaborative Learning.

Interactive teaching also enhances the relationship between students and teachers. When students actively participate in discussions, ask questions, and contribute to group work, it promotes a deeper mutual understanding. Instructors gain insights into students' thought processes and learning needs, which allows them to tailor their teaching strategies more effectively. Additionally, students benefit from the diverse perspectives and expertise of their classmates, leading to a more comprehensive understanding of the subject matter.

Encouraging Active Participation and Critical Thinking.

By integrating interactive elements into the curriculum, such as group discussions, role-playing scenarios, and peer feedback sessions, students are encouraged to actively engage with the content. This approach helps develop their critical thinking skills, as they must analyze, evaluate, and discuss various aspects of management and organizational behavior. For instance, a group discussion on the effectiveness of different leadership styles could prompt students to critically assess real-life examples and debate their merits and drawbacks.

Building Confidence and Motivation.

Interactive teaching methods also play a crucial role in building students' confidence and motivation. As students actively participate and receive positive reinforcement from their peers and instructors, their self-efficacy increases. This confidence boost can lead to a more proactive approach to learning and greater enthusiasm for the subject matter. For example, successful presentations and constructive feedback can motivate students to engage more deeply with the course material and pursue further exploration of topics of interest.

In summary, interactive teaching in "Managing People and Organizations" enriches the learning experience by promoting active participation, enhancing comprehension, and fostering a collaborative learning environment. Through methods such as classroom presentations, online sharing, and peer interactions, students are encouraged to develop a deeper understanding of the material, improve their communication skills, and gain confidence in their abilities. This approach not only benefits students academically but also prepares them for practical application of their knowledge in real-world settings.

4.3. Group Discussions

Group discussions are a teaching method where students are divided into smaller groups to analyze and discuss a specific topic before or during class. In the "Managing People and Organizations" course, I implement this approach by allowing students to form groups of 3 to 4 members each. Each group selects a case study that interests them and engages in an in-depth discussion of the chosen case. Subsequently, a representative from each group presents their findings to the class, and their presentations are recorded and uploaded to the learning platform for further sharing and review.

Benefits of Group Discussions:

In-Depth Case Analysis:

Each group focuses on a single case study, allowing for a thorough examination of its details. This focused approach enables students to explore the case from multiple angles and develop a deep understanding of its complexities. For instance, if one group chooses to analyze a case on Apple's team management strategies, they can delve into specific practices, challenges, and outcomes related to that case.

Broad Exposure to Multiple Cases:

Although each group investigates only one case in detail, the collective effort results in exposure to a wide range of cases. After the presentations and video uploads, the entire class benefits

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from the insights and analyses of multiple cases. This broad exposure helps students understand different perspectives and approaches to managing people and organizations, enriching their overall learning experience.

Development of Presentation and Communication Skills:

Preparing and delivering presentations helps students develop their public speaking and communication skills. By articulating their analysis and findings to their peers, students practice how to clearly convey their ideas, respond to questions, and engage in constructive discussions. This skill development is crucial for future professional settings where effective communication is key.

Enhanced Collaborative Learning:

Group discussions foster collaboration and teamwork. Students work together to analyze the case, share responsibilities, and leverage each other's strengths. This collaborative environment encourages active participation and helps students learn from one another. For example, group members might bring different viewpoints or expertise to the discussion, leading to a richer and more nuanced analysis of the case.

Feedback and Continuous Improvement:

The presentation and video sharing process provides valuable feedback to both students and the instructor. Students receive feedback from their peers and the instructor, which can highlight areas for improvement and reinforce their learning. The instructor also gains insights into the students' understanding and can use this feedback to refine and enhance future course content and teaching strategies.

Encouragement of Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving:

Analyzing cases in groups encourages students to apply theoretical concepts to real-world situations, fostering critical thinking and problem-solving skills. For example, a group discussing a case on employee motivation might explore various motivational theories and assess their effectiveness in the given context, leading to a deeper understanding of how to address similar issues in practice.

In summary, group discussions in the "Managing People and Organizations" course provide a dynamic and engaging way for students to explore and understand course content. By working in small groups, analyzing specific cases, and sharing their findings with the class, students enhance their analytical, communication, and collaborative skills. This method not only broadens their exposure to diverse case studies but also fosters a collaborative learning environment that supports continuous improvement and peer learning. Through this approach, students gain a deeper, more practical understanding of management and organizational principles, preparing them for real-world applications.

5. Conclusion

Through the analysis and summary presented in this paper, we can observe that the "Managing People and Organizations" course reform under the OBE (Outcome-Based Education) principles offers several advantages. These include:

Outcome-Oriented Teaching Design: The course emphasizes designing teaching strategies that focus on achieving specific learning outcomes. This approach prioritizes the development of students' practical skills and innovative capabilities.

Student-Centered Teaching Methods: By placing students at the center of the learning process, this method stimulates their enthusiasm for learning, enhances their critical thinking skills, and boosts their confidence.

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Diverse Evaluation Methods: The varied assessment methods employed in the course provide a comprehensive evaluation of students' overall learning abilities. This approach aims to objectively assess and improve students' overall competencies.

In summary, the curriculum reform based on OBE principles aligns with the needs of a socialist economy by cultivating versatile and sustainably developed application-oriented talents. This theory provides robust support for the professional development of business courses, teaching reforms, and talent cultivation in undergraduate institutions.

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