

Business Management Education under the OBE Framework

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Abstract

This study investigates the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and changes in the business environment on higher education, specifically on the educational models of business administration programs. It examines the implementation of the Outcome-Based Education (OBE) framework in a private university in Guangxi, China. Through a survey of graduates from the classes of 2013 to 2017, the study analyzes how expected outcomes are determined when implementing OBE. The results indicate that interpersonal communication skills, office software application skills, and the ability to learn new knowledge are the most important in the workplace, while courses in management communication, principles of management, and human resource management significantly support career development. This suggests that when implementing the OBE framework, the curriculum should focus more on aligning with practical work skills, particularly in the development of practical abilities and career planning. This study emphasizes the close connection between educational practice and industry needs, providing specific guidance for higher education institutions to address the challenges of the new era. However, this study also has some limitations, such as the sample being limited to graduates from a private university in Guangxi. Future research should include the opinions of more stakeholders to gain a more comprehensive perspective and explore the specific challenges and solutions in the implementation of OBE.

Keywords: Changes in Business Environment, OBE, Business Administration Education, Higher Education

Introduction

In recent years, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on various industries. The effects of the pandemic have not yet dissipated. Although the education sector's response to the pandemic has been relatively timely and reasonable, it has still had some impact on the educational models in higher education (Tadesse & Muluye, 2020; Alqahtani & Rajkhan, 2020). However, educational models must adapt to the new era. Students and higher education institutions need to focus on how to adjust teaching methods to fit the new environment (Li et al., 2022; Rashid & Yadav, 2020).

Meanwhile, profound changes in the business environment, such as globalization, increased business complexity, demographic shifts, and emerging technologies, have issued a strong signal for business transformation (AACSB, 2018a). Therefore, in such an uncertain economic environment, employers are seeking candidates with higher skills. With a significant reduction in job opportunities, the transition from higher education to the labor market has become increasingly challenging (Na, 2021; Mhlanga & Moloi, 2022).

These factors driving changes in the business environment, combined with the marketization of higher education Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka (2006) and reductions in public funding, are forcing higher education institutions to adjust their innovation and entrepreneurship strategies (Zhao & Ferran, 2016; Kimberly & Bouchikhi, 2016). Since business schools are also not immune to these changes and face disruptions similar to other industries Zhao & Ferran (2016), these changes necessitate alterations in educational practices to meet the demands of the business world, the skills of their stakeholders, and research needs (McKahan, 2012).

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and significant changes in the business market on university education models is profound; however, educational models must adapt to the new era. A significant shift in this direction is the Outcome-Based Education (OBE) concept, which has gained widespread recognition globally over the past few decades (Gurukkal, 2018). OBE reflects a paradigm shift in educational philosophy and practice, as it requires the explicit identification of learning outcomes that indicate the development or growth students have achieved upon completing their educational programs (Spady, 1994). These Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs) should guide the curriculum, instruction, and assessment of the educational programs (Spady, 1994). Currently, these changes have sparked widespread interest in the educational outcomes of business education programs in higher education and have led to a notable trend for business schools to adhere to both global and local educational standards. For instance, there are over 800 AACSB (2018b) accredited business schools worldwide. Given the importance of OBE in business education, researching the operationalization of OBE in disciplines such as business management and the impact of educational standards on OBE is evidently significant. Therefore, this paper aims to study how a private university in Guangxi, China, implements the OBE educational framework in its business management program. Specifically, it addresses the following two research questions:

RQ1. Why and how is the OBE model implemented in business management programs?

RQ2. How does the OBE model shape business management programs?

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

OBE Education Concept

The OBE (Outcome-Based Education) concept, also known as competency-based education, goal-based education, and needs-based education, is a complex approach to developing a curriculum that is result-oriented, student-centered, and employs a backward design method. OBE has become a mainstream concept in educational reforms in countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada. OBE signifies that the ultimate goal of instructional design and implementation is the learning outcomes achieved by students during the educational process (Liang, 2022).

OBE is a recognized educational element in addressing socio-economic issues in the knowledge economy world. A study titled "Transformative Perspectives on Higher Education

Quality and Mobility" indicates that educational institutions are making significant shifts towards this new structure to maintain global competitiveness (Hejazi, 2011).

OBE is a method of structuring content around activities that demonstrate students' proficiency in specific skills, knowledge, or behaviors when learning a subject (Sessums, 2016). Outcome-Based Education is fundamentally different from traditional educational methods. It requires a shift in emphasis from curriculum development and outcome-oriented assessment. In OBE, students become the focus of the educational system, with an emphasis on learners' skills and knowledge. As education moves into the 21st century, the trend is shifting towards Outcome-Based Education (OBE). Universities are transitioning from a teacher-centered to a student-centered educational model, focusing on the performance skills of learners and achieving predefined learning outcomes through the application of knowledge.

National and International Frameworks on Outcome-Based Education

National and international education and quality assurance frameworks generally influence OBE. According to existing literature, the international trend in higher education is shifting from a teacher-centered model to a student-centered model, focusing on students' knowledge and practical abilities. This trend is increasingly adopted not only in international qualification frameworks but also in national qualification frameworks. For example, in South Africa, the National Qualifications Framework has established outcome-based formats as a platform for mobility, portability, and progression in achieving learning outcomes (Parker & Walters, 2008). In South Africa, academic quality assurance is based on total quality management, as it benefits employers (Jager & Nieuwenhuis, 2005). Similarly, in the United Kingdom, the quality assurance agency has modified its review methods over the years to focus more on outcome-based aspects. In Malaysia, the Engineering Accreditation Council requires the implementation of OBE as a primary standard for engineering accreditation. In 2010, under Malaysian higher education quality assurance, OBE was introduced into other disciplines such as science and technology, social sciences, and humanities (Eng et al., 2012).

The influence of these educational frameworks on OBE highlights the significant impact of accreditation standards on business education. Among these, the AACSB standards are particularly noteworthy as they are used by business schools worldwide to demonstrate their educational quality (Zhao & Ferran, 2016). Since OBE believes in the integration of school education and workplace education, it requires providing learners with accurate unit standards to offer more substantial support to the industry.

Theoretical Framework

According to existing literature, the international trend in higher education is shifting from a teacher-centered model to a student-centered model, focusing on students' knowledge and practical abilities. Consequently, OBE explicitly defines students' competencies as the anticipated ultimate outcomes of teaching (Eldeeb & Shatakumari, 2013). These anticipated outcomes are used to plan curricula, monitor their implementation, evaluate courses, and assess student performance. Therefore, the key points for implementing the OBE education concept are as follows:

Firstly, identify the expected learning outcomes. Learning outcomes serve as both the endpoint and the starting point of OBE. The outcomes themselves should be clearly articulated and often need to be converted into clear, measurable indicators (Cui, 2018). When defining learning outcomes, it is essential to consider the needs and expectations of all

educational stakeholders. These stakeholders include not only local governments, schools, and employers, but also students, teachers, and parents.

Secondly, construct the curriculum system. Learning outcomes represent a competency structure primarily achieved through course instruction. Therefore, building a curriculum system is crucial for realizing learning outcomes. There should be a clear mapping relationship between the competency structure and the curriculum system structure, with each competency in the structure supported by specific courses. In other words, each course in the curriculum system should contribute to the realization of the competency structure. This mapping relationship ensures that students possess the expected competency structure upon completing the curriculum system (Huo, 2017).

Thirdly, determine teaching strategies. OBE particularly emphasizes what students learn rather than what teachers teach, focusing on the output of the teaching process rather than the input, and prioritizing personalized teaching over "cramming" methods. Personalized teaching requires teachers to accurately understand students' learning trajectories and timely grasp their goals. Based on different requirements, teachers should develop various teaching plans and provide diverse learning opportunities (Dastjerdi, 2016).

Fourthly, self-referential evaluation. OBE teaching evaluation focuses on learning outcomes rather than teaching content, learning time, and learning methods. It employs multi-level evaluation standards, emphasizing the connotation of academic achievement and personal learning progress. Students are assessed at different levels, from unskilled to excellent, based on the degree to which they meet educational requirements, with targeted assessments provided. This clear understanding of students' learning status offers references for schools and teachers to improve their teaching (Rubaai, 2016).

Fifthly, progressively climbing peaks. The learning process is divided into different stages, with learning objectives defined for each stage. These learning objectives progress from basic to advanced levels, ultimately achieving the best results. This means that students with varying learning abilities will use different amounts of time and employ various methods to achieve the same goals (Dhara, 2017). Figure 1 shows the element structure pyramid system under the OBE concept.

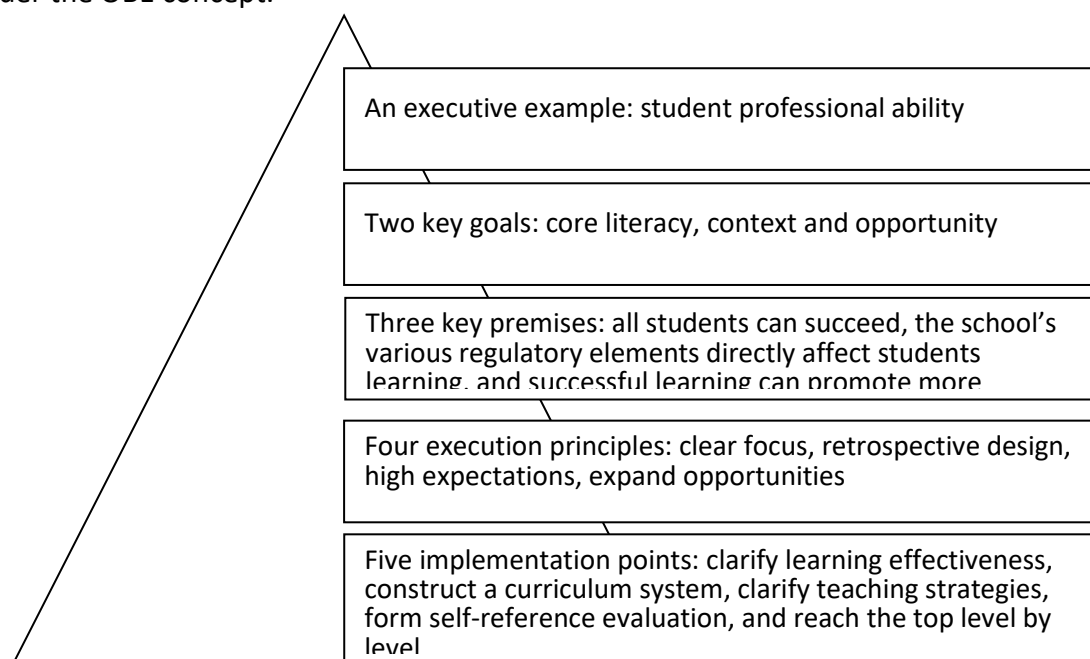


Figure 1 The element structure pyramid system under the OBE concept

Methodology

The concept of OBE starts with learning outcomes derived from the needs of various stakeholders, including students, parents, employers, and local governments. This study investigates students' expectations of their university professional learning from their own perspective. Since the participants are graduates who are already employed, they also partially represent the needs of employers. Naturally, when implementing OBE, it is necessary to separately investigate the expectations of students, employers, parents, and local governments regarding university students' learning outcomes. These expectations should then be comprehensively balanced and used as a basis for constructing the curriculum system.

The sample for this study is taken from the graduates of the Business Administration program at Nanning University from the classes of 2013 to 2017. These graduates are already in relevant job positions and are well aware of the knowledge and skills required for their work. Therefore, this study designed a questionnaire to survey their university courses and related experiences to support the subsequent construction of the curriculum system for the Business Administration program. The questionnaire was conducted through the online survey website "Wenjuanxing" and distributed to students via their respective class advisors, collecting a total of 218 responses. The quality and quantity of the questionnaire used have been tested by the initiator. For this study, the reliability and validity of the items were tested by the researchers using SPSS 26.0. The Cronbach's Alpha level of the items was 0.917, indicating that the internal consistency of the items in the current sample is very high and reasonable. Table 1 shows the demographic data of the respondents.

Table 1

Demographics of respondents (N=218)

Project	Option	Number	Percentage
Gender	Male	83	38.07%
	Female	135	61.93%
Enrollment Year	2013	8	3.67%
	2014	25	11.47%
	2015	74	33.94%
	2016	52	23.85%
	2017	59	27.06%
Duration of First Job After Graduation	Less than 6 months	35	16.06%
	6 months to 1 year	66	30.28%
	1-2 years	57	26.15%
	2-3 years	40	18.35%
	More than 3 years	20	9.17%

Result and Discussion

Employment Status of Business Administration Students

Through the survey, it was found that the highest job-changing rate among Business Administration students occurs within six months to one year after graduation, reaching 30.28%, followed by 1-2 years, which reaches 26.15%. Additionally, 58.26% of the respondents have had a second job. The primary reason for changing jobs is remuneration, followed by development opportunities. The specific details can be seen in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1

Basic Employment Situation of Business Administration Graduates

Project	Option	Number	Percentage
Duration of First Job After Graduation	Less than 6 months	35	16.06%
	6 months to 1 year	66	30.28%
	1-2 years	57	26.15%
	2-3 years	40	18.35%
	More than 3 years	20	9.17%
Whether there was a Second Job	Yes	127	58.26
	No	91	41.74
Reasons for Transition from First to Second Job	Expecting better remuneration	44	34.65%
	Expecting better promotion opportunities and development space	36	28.35%
	Dislike of the original job content	20	15.75%
	Adaptation issues with the original unit's management system	5	3.94%
	Objective reasons such as family or regional factors	15	11.81%
	Other	7	5.51%

For specific job categories, those engaged in administrative work are the largest group, whether in their first or second job after graduation. The next most common positions are in marketing and human resource management. Regarding salary levels, the highest proportion is in the salary range of over 4,000 RMB. It is also noted that in the second job, 58.27% of salaries are above 4,000 RMB. Concerning work locations, most positions are in the city where the university is located, accounting for over 40%. In terms of organizational nature, most jobs are in private enterprises, with a proportion exceeding 70%. The details are shown in Table 2.2.

Table 2.2

Employment Situation of Business Administration Students

	Item	First Job After Graduation		Current Job	
		Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Job Categories	Administrative	47	21.56	29	22.83
	Human Resource Management	35	16.06	21	16.54
	Marketing	46	21.1	15	11.81
	New Media Operations	8	3.67	13	10.24
	Accounting and Finance	2	0.92	4	3.15
	Production and Manufacturing	8	3.67	6	4.72
	Education and Teaching	8	3.67	8	6.3
	Self-Employment	0	0	3	2.36
	Other	64	29.36	28	22.05
Salary Levels	Item	First Job After Graduation		Current Job	
		Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
	Under 2,000 RMB	7	3.21	5	3.94
	2,000 - 3,000 RMB	61	27.98	22	17.32
	3,000 - 4,000 RMB	59	27.06	26	20.47
	Above 4,000 RMB	91	41.74	74	58.27
Work Locations	Item	First Job After Graduation		Current Job	
		Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
	Nanning	106	48.62	52	40.94
	Other Cities in Guangxi	52	23.85	27	21.26
	Guangdong Province	35	16.06	32	25.2
	Yangtze River Delta Region	6	2.75	3	2.36
	Other	19	8.72	13	10.24
Organizational Nature	Item	First Job After Graduation		Current Job	
		Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
	Government Institutions	27	12.39	17	13.39
	State-Owned Enterprises	24	11.01	9	7.09
	Private Enterprises	159	72.94	96	75.59
	Foreign-Funded Enterprises	8	3.67	5	3.94

Feedback on Courses from Business Administration Students

In a survey of academic aspects, it was found that 51.83% of respondents reported that they do not need professional skills certificates. Among those who do, 12.84% require a computer certificate and 6.88% require a human resource management certificate. The top three skills needed in the workplace are interpersonal communication, office software application, and the ability to learn new knowledge, with interpersonal communication being the most important at 70.64%. When asked which personal strengths contribute most to their current job performance, learning and adaptation skills, interpersonal communication skills, and stress resistance were the top three, with learning and adaptation skills being the highest at 87.16%. Regarding which university course has significantly supported their current job, the top three are Management Communication, Principles of Management, and Human Resource Management, with Management Communication achieving 70.64%. Students expressed a desire for universities to enhance practical skills training and career planning.

Table 3

Feedback from Business Administration Students on University Courses

Project	Option	Number	Percentage
Career Skills Certificates Needed for Work	No certificate needed	113	51.83
	English proficiency certificate	10	4.59
	Computer proficiency certificate	28	12.84
	Human resource certificate	15	6.88
	Economist certificate	8	3.67
	Financial certificate	3	1.38
	Other certificates	41	18.81
Main Skills Required for Work (Multiple choices, top three)	communication	154	70.64
	Office software application	130	59.63
	Ability to learn new knowledge	98	44.95
	Organizational and coordination skills	88	40.37
	Copywriting skills	54	24.77
	Data statistical analysis skills	52	23.85
	Application of professional knowledge	35	16.06
	New media application skills	19	8.72
	Innovation ability	12	5.50
	English language skills	12	5.50
Personal Strengths Contributing to Job Performance (Multiple choices, top three)	Learning and adaptation ability	190	87.16
	communication skills	135	61.93
	Stress resistance	85	38.99
	Practical skills	70	32.11
	Teamwork skills	67	30.73
	Mastery of professional knowledge	63	28.90
	Positive work attitude	23	10.55
	New media application skills	21	9.63
University Courses Providing	Management Communication	154	70.64
	Management	98	44.95

Significant Support for Current Work (Multiple choices, top three)	Human Resource Management	87	39.91
	Organizational Behavior	83	38.07
	Marketing	74	33.94
	Business Writing	67	30.73
	Market Research and Forecasting	51	23.39
	Strategic Management	45	20.64
	Financial Management	39	17.89
	Operations Management	32	14.68
	Other	39	17.89
Areas Where the School Needs to Strengthen Guidance	Practical skills training	172	78.90
	Career planning guidance	109	50.00
	Professional knowledge learning	90	41.28
	Innovation and entrepreneurship skills	45	20.64
	Moral and ethical development	20	9.17

Discussion

The above survey provides a clearer understanding of the skills required by business administration students. Additionally, by examining the curriculum, it is determined that courses such as Management Communication, Management, and Human Resource Management can support the corresponding knowledge and skills. Moreover, surveys on the frequency of job changes among students and on "what aspects do you think the school should further strengthen its guidance for students" indicate the necessity of offering practical courses and career guidance courses.

However, in terms of Outcome-Based Education (OBE), students are not the only stakeholders. It is also necessary to investigate the expectations of employers, students' parents, and the government regarding university students' learning outcomes. Of course, this is just the first step in implementing OBE. On this basis, these expectations need to be comprehensively balanced to construct the curriculum system, which supports the development of corresponding abilities.

After constructing the curriculum system, teaching strategies should be designed according to the characteristics of the courses, including the organization of the teaching process and the resources needed for teaching. After the teaching concludes, teaching evaluation is conducted. OBE's teaching evaluation focuses on students' learning outcomes rather than teaching content, learning time, or methods. Therefore, it is crucial to determine the evaluation standards, methods, and subjects in this phase. The evaluation results can verify whether the expected outcomes have been achieved. If the expected outcomes are not met, it indicates that the curriculum system and teaching strategies need continuous improvement. If the expected outcomes are achieved, the next expected goal is pursued, gradually achieving the overall goal. The brief process of implementing OBE is illustrated in Figure 2.

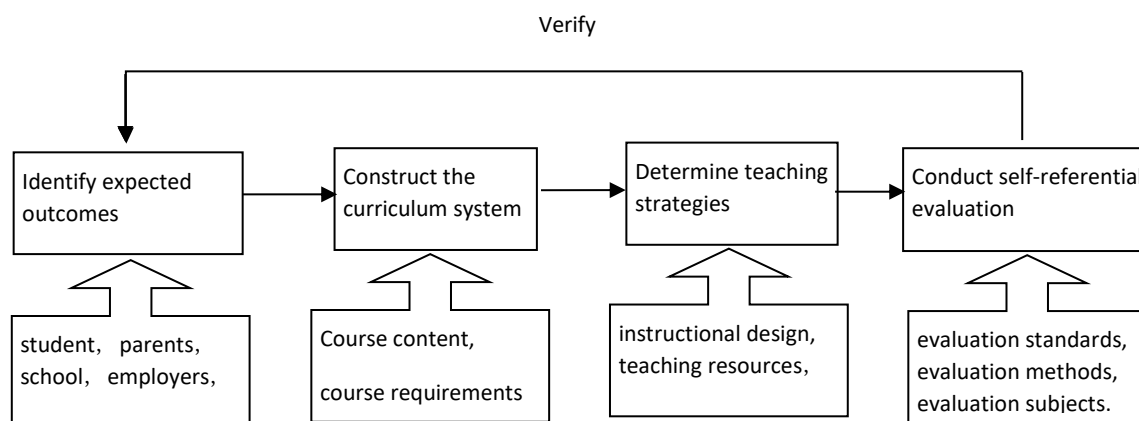


Figure 2 The brief process of implementing OBE

Conclusion

This paper explores the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and changes in the business environment on higher education, with a particular focus on the educational model of business management programs. It examines the implementation of the Outcome-Based Education (OBE) framework in a business management program at a private university in Guangxi, China. The research primarily analyzes how to determine expected outcomes when implementing OBE by surveying graduates' employment status, vocational skills requirements, and feedback on courses. The findings indicate that interpersonal communication skills, proficiency in office software, and the ability to learn new knowledge are the most important in the workplace, while courses in management communication, principles of management, and human resource management provide significant support for graduates' career development. This suggests that when implementing the OBE framework, the construction of the curriculum system should place greater emphasis on aligning with practical job skills, particularly focusing on practical abilities and career planning. Of course, this only reflects the expectations from the students' perspective; actual investigations should also consider the expectations of employers, schools, parents, and local governments.

Research Contributions and Limitations

The study has significant theoretical and practical implications. Firstly, it provides concrete guidance for higher education institutions in responding to the challenges of the new era by helping educators understand how to adjust curricula and teaching strategies to meet market demands. Secondly, the survey of business management students' career development reveals deficiencies in the current educational model and highlights the importance of aligning educational practices with industry needs, providing data support and improvement directions for education policymakers and higher education institutions.

However, this research has some limitations. Firstly, the sample is limited to graduates from a private university in Guangxi, which may not fully represent business management students across China or other regions. Secondly, the study mainly focuses on the students' perspective; future research should include the opinions of employers, students' parents, and local governments to gain a more comprehensive view. Additionally, the research does not delve into the specific challenges and solutions related to the implementation of the OBE framework.

Future research directions could include expanding the sample range to increase the generalizability of results, exploring the effectiveness of OBE implementation across different educational stages and disciplines, and studying the adaptability of the OBE framework in various cultural and policy contexts. Additionally, conducting long-term follow-up studies to assess the long-term impact of OBE implementation on students' career development and proposing targeted improvement recommendations would be valuable.

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