

Exploring the Curriculum Setting and Reform of Preschool Education Majors in Colleges and Universities under the Concept of OBE Education

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Abstract: The philosophy of Outcome-Based Education (OBE) emphasizes student-centered learning outcomes, aiming to innovate teaching content and methods through explicit learning objectives and outcome assessments. Preschool education, crucial for nurturing future early childhood educators, directly impacts students' professional competence and practical teaching abilities. However, current curriculum structures in higher education for preschool education often suffer from uniform content and insufficient practical application. This paper, grounded in the OBE philosophy, analyzes the current state of preschool education curriculum in universities, proposes principles for curriculum design aligned with OBE, and explores specific reform measures and strategies. Research indicates that integrating international best practices with local demands, introducing interdisciplinary courses and project-based learning, and implementing diverse assessment and feedback mechanisms are effective reforms that enhance comprehensive skills and practical abilities of preschool education students. This paper aims to provide theoretical support and practical guidance for the design and reform of preschool education programs in universities, promoting overall enhancement of preschool education quality.

Keywords: OBE education concept; preschool education program in colleges and universities; curriculum; reforms

1. Introduction

Since its inception, the OBE educational philosophy has garnered extensive recognition and application globally. It emphasizes student-centered approaches, prioritizing learning outcomes. By setting clear learning objectives and focusing on outcomes, educational activities revolve around these goals to ensure students achieve anticipated competency levels upon course completion. Under this educational philosophy's guidance, adjustments and optimizations in higher education curriculum and teaching methods are essential to better adapt to contemporary educational needs. Early childhood education, as the foundational stage of the educational system, plays a crucial role in fostering comprehensive development in young children. The curriculum design of early childhood education programs directly impacts the professional quality and practical teaching abilities of future early childhood educators. However, current early childhood education curricula face pressing issues such as relatively narrow content scope, insufficient practical teaching components, and inadequate integration of interdisciplinary knowledge. These challenges severely constrain the cultivation of students' comprehensive abilities, hindering their ability to flexibly meet diverse educational demands in their future careers. Against this backdrop, exploring the application of OBE educational principles in the curriculum design of early childhood education programs at universities becomes particularly crucial. This paper will deeply analyze the fundamental principles and characteristics of OBE educational philosophy, integrating the current status of early childhood education program curricula. It proposes principles for curriculum design and reform measures based on the OBE educational philosophy, aiming to provide theoretical support and practical guidance for the enhancement of comprehensive qualities and practical teaching abilities among students in early childhood education programs at universities, thereby elevating the overall quality of early childhood education.

2. The basic principles and characteristics of OBE education philosophy

The OBE (Outcome-Based Education) philosophy is an educational paradigm focused on achieving

specific results through learning. At its core, this approach posits that the design and implementation of the educational process should be oriented around clearly defined learning outcomes. By means of ongoing assessment and feedback, the approach seeks to ensure that students attain these outcomes. The essence of the OBE philosophy lies in its emphasis on explicit, concrete learning objectives, which encompass not only the acquisition of knowledge but also the application of skills and the cultivation of attitudes. This methodical approach renders education more targeted and effective, significantly enhancing students' learning experiences and achievements. A defining feature of the OBE philosophy is its profound appreciation for individual differences and diversity among students. Recognizing that each student possesses unique learning styles and paces, OBE employs a range of flexible teaching strategies and assessment methods to support students in achieving the desired learning outcomes in their own ways. This personalized educational approach not only acknowledges individual variations but also strives to maximize students' potential, fostering continuous improvement throughout the learning process. Another prominent characteristic of the OBE philosophy is its practice-oriented focus. It underscores the integration of theory and practice through methods such as project-based learning and situational teaching, which enable students to apply their acquired knowledge in real-world contexts and develop problem-solving skills. This practical approach not only enhances students' hands-on abilities and experiential learning but also deepens their understanding of the material. Additionally, OBE emphasizes the importance of continuous assessment and feedback mechanisms. Through regular evaluations of the learning process, educators can gain insights into students' progress and challenges, thereby refining teaching strategies and methods. This dynamic adjustment process ensures the effectiveness and adaptability of the educational experience, aligning it more closely with students' needs and developmental goals. In practice, the OBE philosophy demands that educators design curricula and teaching methods with a clear focus on learning outcomes, establishing detailed plans and assessment criteria^[1]. Through a variety of instructional activities and evaluative measures, it ensures that every student can achieve the set learning objectives. This educational philosophy not only enhances the quality and efficacy of education but also lays a robust foundation for students' comprehensive development.

3. Analysis of the current situation of curriculum setting of preschool education majors in colleges and universities

The current curriculum of early childhood education programs in universities plays a pivotal role in cultivating future early childhood educators. However, numerous pressing issues remain. Existing curricula commonly suffer from singular focus on content, disconnect between theory and practice, and lack of interdisciplinary integration. These issues significantly constrain the comprehensive development of students' skills and practical teaching abilities in the field of early childhood education. Many universities' current programs overly emphasize the imparting of theoretical knowledge while neglecting the importance of practical teaching. Although students acquire substantial theoretical knowledge during their academic tenure, they often demonstrate insufficient experience and adaptability in practical operations and teaching practices. This gap between theory and practice impedes students' swift adaptation to the demands of early childhood education positions post-graduation, thus weakening their professional competitiveness. Furthermore, the relative singularity of curriculum content and the lack of interdisciplinary integration pose significant challenges. Early childhood education, as a field encompassing psychology, education, sociology, and other disciplines, warrants diversified and comprehensive curriculum frameworks. Yet, many university programs still predominantly focus on single disciplines, failing to effectively integrate interdisciplinary knowledge, resulting in students' limited knowledge structures and lacking comprehensive application abilities. Such curriculum configurations fail to meet the diverse knowledge and skill requirements of modern early childhood education. In terms of teaching methods and assessment mechanisms, current curricula also exhibit certain limitations. Traditional teaching methods predominantly rely on teacher-centered instruction, lacking interactivity and innovation, thereby failing to stimulate students' learning interests and initiative. Moreover, assessment mechanisms overly depend on written exams and final assessments, inadequately reflecting students' actual abilities and comprehensive qualities. These teaching methods and assessment mechanisms struggle to cultivate early childhood education professionals with innovation and practical capabilities. Additionally, universities commonly exhibit insufficient absorption of international advanced educational experiences in their curriculum designs. Despite some institutions beginning to adopt advanced educational concepts and models from abroad, overall utilization of international educational resources remains inadequate. Such limitations restrict students' international perspectives and cross-cultural communication abilities, thereby impeding their professional development within a globalized context.

4. Curriculum setting and reform of preschool education majors in colleges and universities based on OBE education philosophy

4.1. Principles of curriculum design based on OBE education philosophy

Based on the educational philosophy of Outcome-Based Education (OBE), the principles of curriculum design emphasize placing the ultimate learning outcomes of students at the core, ensuring that all educational activities revolve around this goal. Specifically, curriculum design should articulate specific, measurable learning objectives that encompass not only the mastery of knowledge but also the application of skills and the cultivation of attitudes. During the design process, attention should be paid to individual differences among students, utilizing diverse teaching strategies and flexible course scheduling so that each student can achieve optimal learning outcomes at their own pace. The curriculum content should be highly practical, integrating theory with practice, encouraging students to apply their learning in real-world contexts to enhance their problem-solving abilities. Furthermore, curriculum design should emphasize interdisciplinary integration, breaking down subject boundaries, promoting the cross-disciplinary application of knowledge, and fostering students' comprehensive qualities. The assessment mechanism should be diversified, focusing on both students' learning processes and their final outcomes, continuously improving teaching methods through ongoing feedback. Such principles of curriculum design not only effectively enhance students' learning outcomes but also lay a solid foundation for their future career development^[2].

4.2. Typical course module design

4.2.1. Integration of practical teaching and theoretical learning

The effective integration of practical teaching with theoretical learning is pivotal in achieving educational objectives within the curriculum of early childhood education at the university level. Current educational models often segregate theoretical learning from practical application, making it challenging for students to translate theoretical knowledge into practical skills during actual teaching scenarios. To address this issue, curriculum designs rooted in the Outcome-Based Education (OBE) philosophy emphasize closely intertwining theoretical learning with hands-on teaching experiences. This approach enables students to deeply comprehend and apply acquired knowledge within authentic educational contexts. Theoretical learning serves not merely as a conduit for knowledge transmission but also as a crucial element in fostering students' critical thinking and theoretical framework construction. Through rigorous theoretical study, students can grasp foundational knowledge in education and psychology, providing robust theoretical support for subsequent practical teaching endeavors. Nevertheless, pure theoretical learning often fails to engage students' enthusiasm and interest fully. Therefore, enriching the curriculum with diverse practical teaching components can effectively compensate for this deficiency. Practical teaching should permeate the entire learning process of the early childhood education program, serving as a bridge for students to understand and apply theoretical knowledge. Through methods such as simulated teaching, classroom observations, and educational internships, students can put theoretical knowledge into practice within authentic or simulated educational environments. Such practical components not only help students consolidate their learning but also enhance their teaching skills and adaptability. Moreover, practical teaching enables students to authentically experience the complexity and diversity of early childhood education, cultivating their ability to solve real-world problems and their professional competence. The integration of theoretical learning with practical teaching should also be reflected in the curriculum assessment framework. Traditional assessment methods primarily focus on theoretical exams, which often inadequately reflect students' actual capabilities. Incorporating practical teaching into the assessment system through comprehensive evaluations of teaching internships, classroom performances, and case analyses allows for a more holistic measurement of students' overall qualities and practical teaching abilities. This diversified assessment approach not only helps identify individual differences and strengths among students but also provides robust grounds for teachers to adjust their teaching strategies. Furthermore, interdisciplinary integration within the curriculum setup is indispensable. Early childhood education encompasses not only pedagogy but also psychology, sociology, arts, and other fields. Through interdisciplinary course designs, students can grasp the essence and breadth of early childhood education from multiple perspectives and levels, fostering their comprehensive application abilities and innovative thinking. In interdisciplinary practical teaching, students learn to integrate knowledge from different disciplines, forming systematic educational philosophies and methodologies.

4.2.2. Integration and application of interdisciplinary knowledge

In the curriculum of early childhood education programs at universities, the integration and application of interdisciplinary knowledge play a pivotal role in nurturing well-rounded educational professionals. Early childhood education encompasses not only pedagogy but also psychology, sociology, arts, health sciences, and other diverse fields. Through interdisciplinary curriculum design, students gain a multifaceted understanding of complex issues in early childhood education, crucial for fostering educators with comprehensive abilities and innovative thinking. Integrating interdisciplinary knowledge necessitates breaking traditional disciplinary boundaries to enrich and synthesize course content. For instance, within educational psychology courses, incorporating methods from the arts, such as visual arts and music, alongside theoretical knowledge of child psychology development enhances students' comprehension and practical application. This integration not only enhances students' engagement but also deepens their sensitivity and understanding of child psychology. Project-based learning and case studies are effective means of interdisciplinary integration in curriculum design^[3]. Through real projects or cases, students synthesize knowledge from different disciplines to address practical challenges. For example, in designing a kindergarten curriculum, students must consider theories from education and psychology, incorporate health sciences knowledge for child safety and well-being, and even employ artistic and physical education methods to enrich the curriculum. Such project-based learning cultivates students' comprehensive application skills and fosters teamwork and communication abilities. Innovative assessment mechanisms are also crucial for achieving interdisciplinary knowledge integration. Traditional assessments often focus on single-discipline mastery, insufficiently reflecting students' comprehensive abilities. Comprehensive interdisciplinary assessments, such as integrated project presentations, interdisciplinary paper writing, and multidimensional practical evaluations, provide a more holistic evaluation of students' learning outcomes and application abilities. This assessment approach not only identifies students' strengths and weaknesses but also provides robust evidence for teachers to adjust teaching strategies. Facilitating interdisciplinary collaboration and professional development among teachers is equally vital. Universities should encourage educators from various disciplines to collaborate in designing and implementing interdisciplinary courses. Through professional exchanges and collaborative teaching, educators enrich course content and provide students with diverse learning perspectives and experiences. This collaborative teaching model not only enhances teaching quality but also stimulates teachers' professional growth and instructional innovation.

4.3. Reform measures and strategies

4.3.1. Integration of international advanced experience and local needs

In the redesign and reform of university early childhood education programs, integrating international best practices with local needs is pivotal for enhancing educational quality. Many countries worldwide have accumulated rich experiences and successful cases in early childhood education, such as Finland's educational system and the Reggio Emilia approach. These serve as valuable references for educational reform in our country. However, blindly adopting foreign experiences may lead to mismatched results. Only by integrating these advanced practices with local needs can their effectiveness truly be realized. Internationally, advanced experiences often demonstrate foresight in educational philosophy, teaching methods, and evaluation systems. For instance, the Reggio Emilia approach emphasizes children's autonomy and exploratory learning, encouraging students to learn through practice and experience. This method could be incorporated into our early childhood education, fostering students' independent learning and innovative thinking abilities. However, adapting this approach requires adjustments that consider our local educational environment and cultural characteristics, such as localizing teaching resources and teacher training to better suit our educational realities. Similarly critical is the consideration of local needs. With our vast geographic and cultural diversity, educational requirements and circumstances vary greatly between rural and urban areas. Therefore, in curriculum reform, it is essential to fully consider the specific conditions of different regions, designing flexible and diverse curriculum models to meet varied educational needs. For example, promoting locally adapted educational projects in rural areas that integrate local cultural features and developing education content with regional characteristics. In curriculum design, introducing international advanced teaching philosophies like project-based learning and gamification, while adapting them to local teaching practices and cultural backgrounds, can enhance educational outcomes. This integration not only draws on foreign advanced experiences but also ensures that the curriculum better meets the practical needs of Chinese students, thereby enhancing teaching effectiveness. For instance, introducing an international advanced early childhood education assessment system and integrating it with local educational evaluation standards to form a scientific and comprehensive assessment system that evaluates students' growth and development

comprehensively. The professional development and training of teachers are also crucial in integrating international experience with local needs. This can be achieved through international cooperation and exchanges, inviting foreign educational experts to lecture in China or sending local teachers abroad to learn from international advanced teaching experiences. Simultaneously, through localized training, teachers' ability to adapt locally is enhanced, enabling them to effectively apply international advanced experiences within the local educational environment^[4].

4.3.2. Introduction of interdisciplinary curriculum and project-based learning

Under the OBE (Outcome-Based Education) philosophy, the integration of interdisciplinary courses and project-based learning in the curriculum design and reform of higher education programs in early childhood education holds significant importance. Interdisciplinary courses transcend traditional academic boundaries, organically merging knowledge from diverse fields to cultivate students' comprehensive qualities and innovative abilities. Project-based learning, through the implementation of real-world projects, enables students to apply theoretical knowledge to practical problem-solving, further enhancing their practical skills and teamwork spirit. The introduction of interdisciplinary courses necessitates the development of a holistic curriculum framework. For instance, combining knowledge from education, psychology, art, and health sciences to create an integrated curriculum module. Such a module can be implemented through various methods such as thematic seminars, interdisciplinary lectures, and practical activities. For example, while studying child psychology, students might integrate art courses, using painting and music to explore the psychological development of children. This not only enriches the curriculum content but also allows students to understand and apply their knowledge from different perspectives. Project-based learning serves as an effective means of implementing interdisciplinary courses. Through projects, students can apply knowledge from different disciplines to specific real-world problems. For instance, in a project on designing a kindergarten environment, students would utilize educational theories to design instructional spaces, apply psychological insights to address children's needs, use artistic knowledge for aesthetic design, and apply health science knowledge to ensure safety and hygiene. Such projects not only develop students' ability to apply knowledge comprehensively but also hone their problem-solving skills and teamwork abilities. The introduction of interdisciplinary courses and project-based learning also requires a scientific evaluation mechanism. Traditional assessment methods often focus on knowledge from individual subjects, making it difficult to comprehensively reflect students' overall capabilities. Designing interdisciplinary assessments, such as project presentations, interdisciplinary research papers, and multidimensional practical evaluations, can provide a more holistic evaluation of students' learning outcomes and application abilities. This evaluation approach not only identifies students' strengths and weaknesses but also provides a solid basis for teachers to adjust their teaching strategies. The professional development and training of teachers are crucial for the successful implementation of interdisciplinary courses and project-based learning. Higher education institutions should encourage collaboration among teachers from different disciplines to jointly design and implement interdisciplinary courses. Through professional exchange and cooperation among educators, curriculum content can be enriched, and students can benefit from diverse learning perspectives and experiences. Additionally, specialized training should enhance teachers' guidance abilities in interdisciplinary teaching and project-based learning, enabling them to effectively guide students in cross-disciplinary studies and project practice.

4.3.3. Implementation of multi-disciplinary assessment and feedback mechanisms

In the context of Outcome-Based Education (OBE) principles, the curriculum design and reform in early childhood education at higher education institutions underscore the critical importance of implementing diverse assessment and feedback mechanisms. Traditional assessment methods typically prioritize single exam scores, which struggle to comprehensively reflect students' overall capabilities and practical application skills. In contrast, diverse assessment and feedback mechanisms employ multidimensional approaches to more comprehensively and fairly evaluate students' learning achievements and developmental potential. The core of diverse assessment lies in its diversity and comprehensiveness. In addition to traditional written exams, it should encompass project presentations, case analyses, essay writing, internship performance, team collaboration, and other assessment methods. For instance, through project presentations, students can demonstrate their practical skills and innovative thinking within specific projects; through case analyses, their ability to analyze and solve practical problems; and through essay writing, their mastery and application of theoretical knowledge. These diverse assessment methods collectively reflect students' comprehensive qualities, thereby avoiding the limitations of singular assessment approaches. Feedback mechanisms constitute an integral part of diverse assessment^[5]. Timely and effective feedback assists students in understanding their strengths and weaknesses, facilitating continuous improvement and enhancement. Feedback should not only come

from teachers but also involve peer assessment and self-evaluation. Through peer assessment, students gain feedback from different perspectives, broadening their ways of thinking; through self-evaluation, they reflect on their learning processes, enhancing self-awareness and independent learning skills. For instance, after completing a project, teachers can organize student presentations and invite peers and teachers to collectively evaluate, forming a multidimensional feedback system. Implementing diverse assessment and feedback mechanisms also necessitates establishing scientific assessment standards and processes. Assessment criteria should be clear, specific, and capable of comprehensively reflecting students' comprehensive performance in knowledge, skills, attitudes, and other aspects. For example, when assessing a project, evaluation can cover multiple dimensions such as project design, implementation process, results presentation, and teamwork, ensuring comprehensive and fair assessment. The assessment process should be transparent and standardized, with assessment results promptly provided to students along with improvement suggestions, helping them clarify their directions for effort. Teachers play pivotal roles in diverse assessment and feedback mechanisms^[6]. They serve not only as assessors but also as guides and providers of feedback. Throughout the assessment process, teachers should fairly and justly evaluate students' performances and provide timely and accurate feedback to help students recognize their strengths and areas for improvement. Concurrently, teachers should encourage active student participation in the assessment process, fostering collective progress through interaction and communication. Implementing diverse assessment and feedback mechanisms effectively enhances the comprehensive qualities and innovative abilities of early childhood education students. Guided by OBE principles, diversified assessment methods and scientific feedback mechanisms enable a more comprehensive and equitable evaluation of students' learning achievements, promoting their holistic development. This not only contributes to enhancing educational quality but also lays a solid foundation for nurturing high-quality early childhood education professionals capable of meeting future societal demands^[7].

5. Conclusions

The OBE educational philosophy offers novel insights and directions for the curriculum design and reform in preschool education programs at institutions of higher learning. By delving into the understanding and application of the OBE philosophy, it becomes possible to enhance the relevance and effectiveness of courses, augmenting students' learning outcomes and practical abilities. Through an analysis of the current curriculum setup at universities for preschool education majors, this paper proposes a series of design principles and reform measures based on the OBE philosophy, aiming to foster the comprehensive development of preschool education majors. The measures emphasize the integration of international best practices with local needs, contributing to the diversification and globalization of course content. The introduction of interdisciplinary courses and project-based learning not only expands students' knowledge base but also enhances their comprehensive application skills. The implementation of a multidimensional assessment and feedback mechanism enables the timely evaluation of students' learning outcomes, facilitating continuous improvement and optimization in teaching methods. In the future, universities should continue to explore the application of the OBE philosophy, and continuously optimize course design and teaching approaches based on practical conditions. Through continued reform and innovation, we can cultivate a greater number of preschool education professionals with high-quality and practical skills, infusing new vitality and momentum into the field of early childhood education. Only thus can we truly elevate preschool education as a whole, meeting society's pressing demand for high-quality early childhood education.

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