

Teaching Reconstruction of the Course "International Trade" under the OBE Concept

Yafang Li*

School of Economics and Trade, Guangzhou Xinhua University, Dongguan, Guangdong, 523133, China

**Corresponding author: 1078725296@qq.com*

Keywords: OBE Concept; International Trade; Curriculum Reconstruction

Abstract: As the collaborative development of digital trade and cross-border e-commerce, there is an increasingly demand for international trade talents who possess both an international perspective and professional competence. Guided by the concept of Outcome-Based Education (OBE for short), this paper aims to explore the necessity, practical challenges, and reconstruction pathways of the curriculum system for the course International Trade. By applying the OBE concept in the teaching of international trade majors, this study proposes a curriculum reconstruction centered on achieving the final learning outcomes of mastering "core international trade theories, policy tools, and analytical abilities." The aim is to enhance students' practical skills and professional qualities, ensure close alignment between educational content and industry demands, and cultivate compound international economic and trade talents equipped with an international outlook and innovative thinking.

1. Introduction

As a fundamental course for the International Economics and Trade major, the course International Trade shoulders the significant mission of cultivating students' professional competence and practical abilities. This course emphasizes the integration of theoretical exposition and case analysis, transforming abstract theory into vivid and specific practical cases to facilitate students' better understanding. Meanwhile, International Trade is a highly applied course with a high degree of knowledge integration. It not only requires students to have a solid grasp of basic theory but also places great emphasis on cultivating their analytical and application abilities, enabling them to apply what they have learned to solve practical problems in the future positions. Therefore, the teaching reconstruction of the International Trade course plays a crucial role in the cultivation of international economic and trade talents. The concept of OBE and teaching reconstruction are widely promoted in the curriculum teaching reform of Chinese universities. Reconstructing the International Trade course based on the OBE concept holds certain reference significance for cultivating international economic and trade talents who can meet the needs of society.

2. Research on the OBE educational philosophy

OBE originated from educational reforms in the United States and Australia in the 1980s and was formally proposed by Spady in 1994. Initially, it focused on standardizing competencies, shifting educational objectives from "what teachers teach" to "what students learn." Since the 21st century, it has gradually expanded from micro-level areas such as learning units and courses to encompass entire disciplines and the entire K-12 education system, as well as the field of higher education. Research on OBE in European and American countries has entered a refined stage, concentrating on areas such as curriculum element design (Wiggins, 2005) and standardization of evaluation systems (Marzano, 2000). McTighe proposed a three-dimensional assessment framework of "performance-attitude-progress," providing theoretical support for outcome evaluation. In 2010, Spady and others extended OBE to the realm of lifelong learning, constructing an educational paradigm for the future society.

In 2016, the China Engineering Education Accreditation Association (CEEAA) released the "Engineering Education Accreditation Standards," explicitly requiring engineering programs to adopt the OBE concept in teaching. Projects such as the Ministry of Education's "New Engineering" initiative and the "Double First-Class Plan" have also made OBE a core evaluation criterion. Subsequently, keywords like "OBE + Teaching Reform" and "OBE + Curriculum Design" have frequently emerged, reflecting a research trajectory in China that follows a path of "policy-driven implementation—practical exploration—theoretical refinement."

The OBE concept is an educational model centered on students' learning outcomes, emphasizing that educational activities should be designed and implemented around the final learning achievements attained by students. This teaching philosophy breaks away from the traditional education model dominated by teacher-led instruction and rote learning. It is committed to cultivating compound talents with innovative capabilities and the ability to solve real-world problems. Currently, some universities in China have initiated explorations of curriculum teaching reforms based on the OBE in their International Economics and Trade majors, achieving remarkable results. However, these courses are mostly focused on practical subjects such as "International Trade Practice" and "Documents and Correspondence", while there is a lack of research on theoretical courses like "International Trade". Further research is needed to explore the teaching reconstruction of the "International Trade" course under the OBE concept, discussing its specific applications in curriculum design, teaching methods, and assessment systems.

3. Practical Challenges

3.1 Challenges in Backward Course Design

During the implementation of OBE-oriented backward design, the absence of established theoretical course models creates significant hurdles. Specifically, in restructuring content modules, educators face difficulties in determining which traditional theory knowledge to retain to ensure the systematicity and integrity of the whole course, which elements to deepen to align with competency development requirements, which sections to streamline to prevent cognitive overload from redundant information, and how to integrate related content for synergistic development.

Moreover, theoretical courses often risk falling into the "chalk-and-talk" trap, where teachers dominate instruction while students remain passive recipients^[1]. Under OBE principles, a critical unresolved issue lies in transforming traditional pedagogical paradigms—shifting from knowledge transmission-centered objectives to ability-output-oriented frameworks—to foster active student engagement and critical thinking.

3.2 Challenges in Teaching Method Innovation

When innovating teaching methods under the OBE framework for International Trade—a course characterized by dense theoretical content and abstract concepts—educators encounter multiple challenges. First, regarding method selection, while case-based teaching, problem-based learning (PBL), simulation exercises, research-oriented learning, debates, and flipped classrooms are widely discussed, there remains a lack of clear criteria for identifying approaches best suited to the course's unique characteristics. Second, the challenge lies in integrating these pedagogical approaches with cutting-edge trade issues—such as global value chain restructuring, digital trade evolution, and emerging forms of trade friction—to cultivate students' advanced and higher-order competencies.

Moreover, educators must strike a balance between theoretical rigor and methodological effectiveness. While diversifying teaching approaches, it remains essential to maintain in-depth coverage and systematic transmission of core theoretical knowledge, preventing fragmented instruction or superficial engagement with course fundamentals.

3.3 Challenges in OBE-Oriented Assessment Systems

Traditional course assessment methods, primarily reliant on final written examinations, emphasize rote memorization of knowledge and fail to evaluate the higher-order competencies required under OBE principles. Consequently, establishing a competency-oriented assessment system has become a critical priority in current teaching reforms. However, practical implementation faces multiple challenges.

Firstly, redesigning assessment tools is central to this transformation. Educators must develop diversified, process-oriented, and competency-focused instruments—such as analytical reports, case study solutions, and research proposals—to effectively measure students' depth of theoretical understanding, applied problem-solving abilities, and critical thinking skills. Secondly, the complexity of competency evaluation poses significant challenges in standardization. Given the multifaceted nature of higher-order abilities demonstrated through these assessment tools, establishing transparent, quantifiable scoring criteria for objective and equitable evaluation remains an urgent unresolved issue. Lastly, achieving effective feedback loops constitutes another critical consideration. The system must ensure timely, actionable feedback to both students and teachers while driving continuous pedagogical improvement, thereby fostering a positive cycle between assessment outcomes and teaching enhancement.

4. Reconstruction pathways

As an open discipline, International Trade remains in a state of dynamic evolution driven by ongoing socio-economic practices. Consequently, keeping pace with the times has become one of the fundamental principles that must be upheld in teaching, ensuring that the knowledge and skills acquired by students stay aligned with the cutting-edge developments of the industry.

4.1 Reconstruct Course Content

Guided by outcome-oriented objectives, we define the ultimate learning outcome as enabling students to "master core theories, policy tools, and analytical capabilities in international trade." The course content can be disaggregated into three key competency dimensions. The first dimension is the competency of applying Trade Theory, encompassing practical case analyses of theories such as comparative advantage, factor endowments, and intra-industry trade. The second dimension centers on the competency of analyzing trade effects, including the impacts of tariff and non-tariff measures.

The third dimension involves the competency of interpreting trade policies, with a focus on the implications of WTO regulations, regional economic integration frameworks, and agreements such as the RCEP, as illustrated in Table 1.

Table1: Reconstruction of Course Content

Capability Dimension	Course Module	Final Outcomes
Trade Theory Application	Introduction	Core Theories
	Traditional International Trade Theories	
	Contemporary International Trade Theories	
	Trade Protection Theories	
	International Trade Policies	
Trade Effect Analysis	International Trade and Benefit Distribution	Policy Tools
	Tariff Measures	
	Non-Tariff Barriers	
	Measures to Encourage Exports and Export Controls	
Trade Policy Interpretation	Trade Treaties and Agreements	Analytical Capabilities
	Regional Economic Integration	
	International Trade in Services and Intellectual Property Protection	
	International Factor Mobility and Multinational Corporations	
	Digital Economy and International Trade	

4.2 Stratified Instructional Methodology

To sustain students' engagement, landmark cases can be strategically integrated into theoretical and policy-oriented modules. For instance, students can analyze the dynamic shifts in comparative advantage through the lens of the 'Sino-US Trade Friction', examining how geopolitical tensions and trade policies reshape economic relationships. Additionally, the 'Airbus-Boeing Government Subsidy Dispute' can serve as a practical example to explore the trade effects of state subsidies, shedding light on their profound impacts on the competitive landscape of the global aviation industry and the broader international trade order. When it comes to policy interpretation, the RCEP can be used as a case study to analyze the welfare implications of regional economic integration.

Implement a three-tier task system with Foundation, Intermediate, and Advanced levels in curriculum development. The foundation tier is designed for all students to reinforce foundational concepts and knowledge points. This approach enables students to promptly evaluate their grasp of fundamental concepts^[2]. The platform XueXiTong's automated grading system provides real-time feedback and assessments, allowing students to track their learning progress and adjust their study strategies accordingly.

Moving to the Intermediate tier, students are required to work in groups to deliver presentations on "Current Hot Topics in International Trade", with the instructor suggesting research themes focusing on cutting-edge industry developments such as recent trade dynamics in emerging markets, adjustments to international trade policies, and emerging trends in cross-border e-commerce. Through independent news gathering and application, students can enhance theoretical knowledge and analytical competency^[3]. The Advanced tier is tailored for high-performing students with a strong interest in international trade. During lectures, instructors propose potential research questions and directions, encouraging students to identify critical issues in contemporary

international trade, integrate real-world case studies into their analyses, and select thesis topics that are both academically relevant and practical.

4.3 Dynamic Evaluation and Feedback-Driven Improvement

To ensure accurate assessment of students' learning progress, enable prompt adjustment of teaching strategies, and facilitate continuous improvement in teaching quality, it is essential to establish a dynamic evaluation and feedback-driven improvement mechanism, which is presented in Figure 1. This mechanism employs a diversified assessment approach, comprehensively evaluating students' performance across all stages of the learning process. The specific assessment components and their weightings are as follows: pre-class self-study (4%) + attendance (4%) + classroom interaction (12%) + chapter exercises (12%) + group presentations (8%) + final examination (60%).

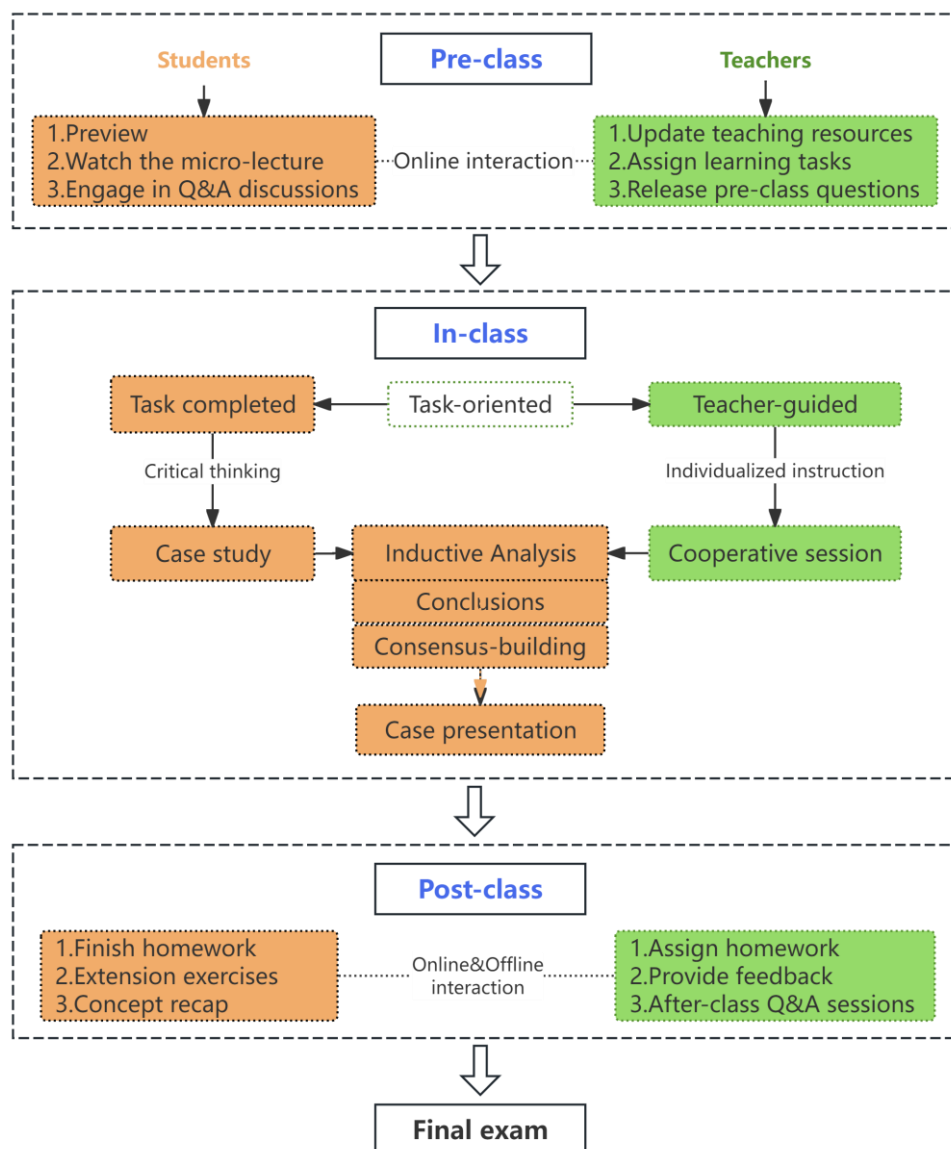


Figure 1: Dynamic evaluation mechanism

This Reconstruction path reduces the weighting of attendance while introducing a pre-class self-study component and shifting group presentation content to foreign trade current affairs. Before

each new lesson, instructors publish clear learning tasks and objectives on the XueXiTong platform, requiring students to independently study designated materials, including micro-lecture videos, electronic textbooks, relevant academic papers, or industry reports. Post-class assignments serve as "checkpoints" for real-time, precise assessment of students' mastery of foundational theories. Group presentations aim to enhance students' information retrieval and data processing capabilities, with evaluations based on three dimensions: accuracy of data acquisition, standardization and clarity of chart conversions, and rationality of conclusions. Through topic analysis, students integrate theoretical knowledge with practical cases, improving their comprehensive analytical skills while cultivating teamwork and communication abilities.

Additionally, students are encouraged to actively participate in teaching feedback inquiry. During the mid-semester evaluation, anonymous questionnaires are used to collect opinions and suggestions on teaching content, methods, and pacing. Based on this feedback, instructors promptly adjust teaching strategies and approaches, optimizing content and instructional segments to better align with students' learning needs and cognitive patterns.

5. Conclusion

Starting from students' learning outcomes, it implemented backward design in various teaching segments of the course to ensure that teaching activities are closely centered around learning outcomes, achieving a transformation from focusing on "what to teach" to emphasizing "what students should learn." It shows the integration of the OBE concept in the theoretical course International Trade. Meanwhile, a comprehensive and meticulous record has been kept of the teaching implementation process, covering multiple aspects, including teaching procedures, student engagements, challenges encountered, and corresponding coping strategies. Through dynamic monitoring and real-time adjustments, we can promptly identify and resolve teaching issues, ensuring teaching activities proceed smoothly and teaching objectives can be attained. Ultimately, this approach returns to the essence of talent cultivation and promotes the development of high-quality talent.

References

- [1] Li, Z. (2023). Classroom teaching reform in international economics and trade under the OBE framework: A case study of the "International Economics" course. *Western China Quality Education*, 9(24), 5-9.
- [2] Tu, Y. F., & Wang, F. (2024). Exploration of seminar-style teaching reform in international trade under the OBE paradigm. *Gansu Education Research*, (06), 78-81.
- [3] Wu, J. G. (2021). An exploration of the implications of cognitive hierarchy theory for teaching the "International Trade" course. *Education and Teaching Forum*, 28, 19-22.
- [4] Huang, J. P., & Chen, Z. (2025). Research on the construction path of ideological and political education system in international economics and trade under the OBE concept. *Foreign Economy and Trade*, (07), 131-135.