

## The Applied Research of Informal Learning based on Undergraduate Economics and Management Teaching

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**Abstract:** Undergraduate economic management majors usually have special problems such as high professional practice teaching requirements, a wide range of industries, strong professionalism, boring curriculum content, lack of high-quality teaching materials, and insufficient communication between teachers and students. In order to solve these questions, this paper presented that an informal learning was an effective way to solve the problem of undergraduate economics and management teaching and conducted a feasibility demonstration. This paper summarized the three forms of informal learning including Social Software applications for personal online learning, formation of virtual communities, and Micro-learning. The last this paper built the model of informal learning environments based on the double structure of professional teachers to guide and students' independent learning for undergraduate economics and management teaching.

### 1. Introduction

The rapid development of China's economy urgently requires professional management talents. The primary task of undergraduate economics and management professional education was to train high quality management personnel that possess professional skills and management. According to twenty-eight theory, 80% of the people of knowledge was obtained through informal learning. Formal learning at school, students also mastered a considerable part of the intellectual through informal learning. The traditional formal learning could not meet and could not guarantee the demand that undergraduate economics and management students mastered and learned for professional expertise and management knowledge.

In foreign countries, scholars' research on informal learning has focused on cognitive, social, emotional and cultural dimensions.<sup>[1-2]</sup> In China, the research on informal learning is conducted in the following areas: The first is to investigate the status of informal learning; the second is the impact of technological development on informal learning, such as the development of network mobile technology; the third is the informal learning status of students at different levels of education, such as middle school students, elementary school students or undergraduates; The fourth is to interpret the influential factors of informal learning from different perspectives, such as the impact of school management on informal learning.<sup>[3-7]</sup>

Although informal learning research has achieved a lot of results in theory and practice, there is less research on informal learning in specific professional teaching. In particular, the reasons, feasibility, and specific methods of implementing informal learning in the teaching of economic management majors need to be further studied. Therefore, the social software used in informal learning, to help undergraduate economics and management students to learn professional knowledge and skills, to deepen the understanding and mastery of the professional knowledge for students.

## **2. Characteristics of Undergraduate Economics and Management Teaching**

### **2.1. High Requirements of Professional Practice Teaching**

The main economics and management courses mostly were economics, management, marketing, statistics, logistics management, supply chain management and other professional courses. These courses required high maneuverability and practicality. The construction of experimental base and laboratory needed to invest a higher cost. So for those schools who invest less, less than the level of laboratory building, students lacked practical operation and owed hands-on ability, not to do in the future to work in "real-time to get started".

### **2.2. A Wide Range of Industry Covers and Uneven Level of Teachers**

The economic and management profession covers a wide range of industries. This required that students understood the characteristics of various industries and different sectors of the requirements in the learning of the professional courses. Comparing with foreign countries, the economic and management profession had problems such as time later and uneven level of teachers. There was a certain gap between professional standards of teachers and the requirements of students learning.

### **2.3. Highly Professional and Curriculum Boring**

The economic and management had highly professional. In the formal education process, classroom often showed boring, dull and unable to attract the attention of students. Course based on theoretical knowledge, if the lack of practical training courses, there was great difficulty for the learning of students about the professional knowledge and skills.

### **2.4. Lack of Quality Teaching Materials**

The quality of professional teaching played a vital role for professional education. The economic and management as a new multi-disciplinary lacked of complete and read-made materials. There were large numbers of various types of materials, but materials were outdated in most of school. New materials had many problems such as content vague, inadequate depth of knowledge and involved content too broad. They had not their own research characteristics and didn't reflect the theory and technology of modern social and business development status. Most were copied to copy. Location and level was not clear enough. It was lacked of core material. Also low level of teaching materials was the main reasons of influencing on the current economic and management teaching quality.

### **2.5. Inadequate Teacher-student Communication**

Since the majority of university teachers were non-imprisoned system, basically, the instructor class and the class to go. It was inadequate teacher-student communication. Students couldn't find a teacher to answer questions timely and teachers couldn't grasp the situation of students learning

## **3. The Feasibility Analysis of Informal Learning**

Informal learning was the kind of learning that may occur in the classroom and the physical environment of beyond the school or the internet virtual environment. Learning might be reached in the case of without prior plan, and without identified evaluation program, and even without realize that when human. This learning mainly referred to when do learning, when learning to play, when learning the game, such as the salon, reading, parties, play, etc. <sup>[8]</sup>

### **3.1. The Social of Informal Learning Expanded the Acceptable Range of Knowledge**

Compared with formal learning, students accessed to knowledge through informal learning that was not directly or indirectly from the teachers. The knowledge source of informal learning was

diversity, including family, friends, colleagues, neighbors, libraries, television, Internet and other mass media, etc. Knowledge of informal learning was acquired through the social interaction of non-teaching.

### **3.2. Various Forms of Informal Learning**

Unlike formal learning, informal learning had not regular teachers, places, earning content; The form of informal learning might be conversations between employees, the search of information in the knowledge base, the exchange of ideas to share, help, observation of colleagues or other people around, chat in the café. Informal learning was a blended learning, its spaces might be near a computer, table, lounge, corridor, e-mail, weixin, qq...

### **3.3. Informal Learning Emphasis on Collaboration**

While effort to create an atmosphere of a self-development and exploration, informal learning encouraged the team through dialogue, feedback and problem-solving and other learning activities to enhance the collective knowledge and performance. Thus, informal learning was more focused on collaboration between individuals, more emphasis on communication, sharing. Sharing culture was a major feature of informal learning.

### **3.4. Informal Learning Could have a Clear Purpose or Accidental**

Whether the purpose should be another learning by latitude. The learning outcomes of Informal learning and formal learning were likely to be pre-expectations, but also were likely to be accidental. Some informal learning had a clear goal, such as improved a kind of software or using a new tool. Most of the time, the goal of informal learning was not clear, such as the understanding of corporate culture, the role of the new find "feel" and so on.

### **3.5. The Promotion of Social Software to Promote Informal Learning**

Social software was software that could promote any group communication and writing. Social software focused on "social", through social connection it promoted the conversion between the knowledge, the exchange and sharing. All could support a network of mutual understanding between different users could be called social software tools, such as Blog, Wiki, Tag, RSS, etc. Information age, the network had become an integral part of the students daily life. Good interactive social software had been an important part of study online, work, with people and entertainment for students. A wide range of social software, each had its own distinctive characteristics and functions, and it played in their own unique advantages in informal learning.

To sum up, informal learning was everywhere. Through inspired the positive and autonomy of students learning, application of modern information technology to create exchange platform and the learning environment of informal learning, this made Using informal learning in the undergraduate economic and management teaching possible.

## **4. Building the Model of Informal Learning Environments for Undergraduate Economic and Management Teaching**

### **4.1. The Form of Informal Learning**

#### **4.1.1. Social Software Applications for Personal Online Learning.**

Williams Davis recognized that social software was software that could promote any group communication and writing.<sup>[9]</sup> Social Software did not guarantee effective learning, but to use it properly, we could create a great learning environment of affinity, supporting force and content-rich for learners. Social software could help learners to focus and increase and maintain interest in learning. It could help learners to build new knowledge on the basis of the original knowledge, or access to information in their own unique way, and contribute to the occurrence of the learning

process. Economics and management students used various types of software to make up for the shortcomings of classroom learning. Social software enhanced students learning motivation, focused their attention, it would have a direct positive impact on learning. Social software with personalized, subjective, social and diversity allowed students the freedom to choose what, where science, when science, how to learn, and learn with who together, and so on. it was the most common way that the students gained knowledge.

#### **4.1.2. Formation of Virtual Learning Communities.**

Virtual Learning Community was a virtual learning environment which built on the Internet by a common interest and learning purpose of people composed the study groups.<sup>[10]</sup> Undergraduate economics and management students used a variety of network communication tools, through mutual communication, interaction, discussion and collaboration, and collaborative learning and other learning methods, shared each other's views, ideas, resources, knowledge, learning experiences and collective wisdom. This approach could help students to promote knowledge construction and individual intellectual development, and achieve the purpose of studying and promoting the development of their own learning.

#### **4.1.3. Micro-learning.**

Learning of expert Lindner Austria (Lindner) thought that micro-learning was a new learning based on the micro- content and micro-media and existed in the new media ecosystem. Network technology and communication technology made the media into a new era of ecological. Some applications forms of emerging Internet media and mobile media collectively referred to as new media, it expressed digital two-way interactive features and so on. Miniaturization of the media terminal equipment (such as MP4, MP5, mobile phones, laptops, etc.) and diversification of micro-content (such as SMS, MMS, email, micro-blogging, etc.) provided sufficient external environment and internal driving force, led to the formation of micro-learning for the changes of technical support in learning styles. Micro-learning could not rely on the learner's own existence of a continuous strong motivation as an implementation mode of informal learning. Instead the learner was in a note state of marginal and non-continuous input. Designers should consider how to obtain and control the learner's attention, and be given sustained the stimulus and feedback of stimulating learning. So undergraduate economics and management students applied this approach that made students always have a happy joyful free and open feeling in the micro-learning experiences, this was a very important design principles. This freedom and openness was reflected in the mentality of ease, and the attention acting freely, self- selection of learning content and self-creation and other aspects.

#### **4.2. Construction of Model**

First, the process of informal learning was acquisition of knowledge, then we must considered how to organize, spread, publish, share information with others, and the exchange of knowledge, collaboration with others, as well as knowledge management were throughout the process. The construction of the informal learning environment should be based on self-control of students and a reasonable guidance of teachers, the research and development and popularity of social software was a strong support of necessary learning tools to achieve this model. Based on this, this paper built appropriate environment model of informal learning for undergraduate economics and management professional.

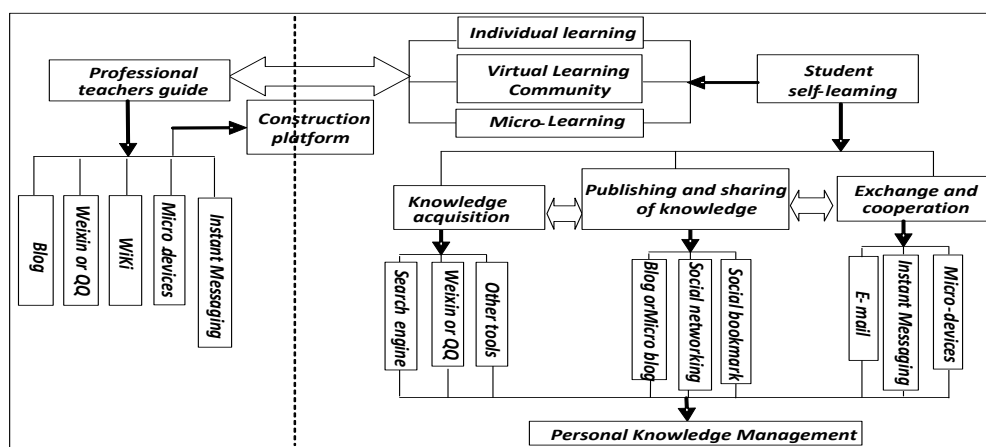


Figure 1. The environment model of informal learning for undergraduate economics and management

The model was divided into two levels that were the economics and management professional instructor and student self-learning. In the part of teachers' guidance, Economics and management professional teachers should combine with the characteristics of economics and management professional to guidance students and actively help students to find relevant professional information and knowledge. This approach could improve students learning efficiency, solve the technical or psychological problems when courses learning and the process of and communication encountered. And teachers guided students to form a virtual learning community or network group, micro-study in order to fully develop and play the spirit of students' teamwork. In the part of student self-learning, students obtained the knowledge through a search engine, RSS and other social software and conversation in daily life, practice, etc.<sup>[11]</sup> This knowledge became personal information by finishing and transformation. Then it was summed and summary. Through the formation of virtual learning communities, or micro-learning, etc., these individuals knowledge was released on the Internet or be shared when talk with others. Students could participate in the network group or a virtual learning community in order to exchange and collaboration with a partner or professional teachers. The personal knowledge management was throughout the process of learning and communication. In the learning process, Students got internal support through interaction with the knowledge and partners, through the satisfactory of individual needs and the value of the realization, and with support from teachers and partners. It helped students improve interest and motivation of learning and made informal learning activities to continue.

The characteristics of undergraduate economics and management teaching often led students lack of learning interest and motivation in formal learning. So we shall apply informal learning, carry out blended learning and guide learners to go on informal learning after school. Students will use social software, virtual learning communities, micro-learning and other forms to go on informal learning after school that could make up lack of learning in classroom. Informal learning could play adequately subject, make students to acquire knowledge conscious, promote learning. Therefore, we shall effectively integrate social software with informal learning, make learning penetrate into daily network, use fragmented time to improve efficiency of the learning, and it will achieve optimal education and learning.

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