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Academia–Industry Synergy for Sustainable Co-Teaching in MBA Organizational Behavior at Caucasus University

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ABSTRACT

The study investigates the effectiveness of a co-teaching model in enhancing student learning outcomes in an organizational behavior course at Caucasus University (CU), Georgia. The model combined academic theory with real-world industry practices by having two instructors teach 39 MBA students at the same time. One instructor delivered theoretical content, while the other, an industry specialist, contributed applied insights. A mixed-methods design guided the research, incorporating pre- and post-course surveys, semi-structured interviews with instructors, student focus group discussions, and course material analysis. These tools enabled a comprehensive evaluation of student perceptions, the impact of industry engagement, and instructor collaboration. Findings indicate that exposure to industry professionals significantly improved students' understanding of organizational behavior concepts, critical thinking, and problem-solving abilities. Students particularly valued real-life case studies and industry visits. Analysis informed by fuzzy-set Qualitative Comparative Analysis (fs/QCA) showed that the most effective learning occurred when academic instruction, practical engagement, and interactive learning co-occurred. The work contributes to the literature on innovative and sustainable pedagogical practices in higher education, particularly within emerging contexts such as Georgia. It highlights the potential of co-teaching to bridge the gap between academic knowledge and real-world competencies while promoting pedagogical sustainability through collaboration, relevance, and lifelong learning. The model supports the broader goals of education for sustainable development by preparing graduates for adaptive, ethically responsible professional practice.

Keywords: Co-teaching, Higher education, Organizational behavior, Sustainability education, Pedagogical innovation.

Introduction

In recent decades, business education has faced growing scrutiny for its limited responsiveness to the realities of contemporary organizational life. Critics have emphasized a persistent gap between theoretical instruction and practical application, raising questions about the effectiveness of traditional MBA curricula (Bennis & O'Toole, 2005; Ghoshal, 2005). As global business environments continue to shift, there is an increased expectation for graduates to demonstrate both conceptual understanding and operational competence (Datar *et al*., 2010).

In response, academic institutions have begun experimenting with new pedagogical formats that aim to improve the relevance and utility of business education. One such format is co-teaching, which involves collaboration between academic faculty and industry professionals within the same course structure. This approach aims to improve the educational experience by integrating scholarly frameworks with real-world perspectives (Kezar & Maxey, 2016). In the context of MBA programs, where students are preparing for leadership roles in diverse sectors, the inclusion of practitioners alongside academics creates opportunities to convey theoretical content in more immediately applicable ways.

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These methods are becoming more widely acknowledged in modern higher education as a component of a larger trend toward teaching that is focused on sustainability. Sustainable education places a strong emphasis on continuity, adaptability, ethical responsibility, and relevance, elements that guarantee learning is still beneficial in quickly shifting social and economic environments (Sarkar *et al*., 2023; Doddapanen *et al*., 2024). By fostering long-lasting partnerships between academia and industry, bolstering institutional resilience, and promoting lifelong learning competencies in line with the UN Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), co-teaching, with its collaborative and practice-linked structure, embodies pedagogical sustainability.

Despite its promise, this approach also raises significant questions. It necessitates a reevaluation of conventional pedagogical approaches, presents structural and institutional obstacles, and encourages investigation into students' perceptions and reactions to this dual instructional format. Moreover, there is a need to understand how such models impact course content, delivery, and outcomes.

While co-teaching is increasingly discussed in global education discourse, little is known about how this model unfolds in post-Soviet or transitional contexts such as Georgia, where business education has rapidly expanded over the past two decades yet continues to face systemic challenges related to innovation, integration, and internationalization. Embedding sustainability-oriented pedagogical models in such settings is particularly valuable, as they contribute not only to academic relevance but also to the cultivation of socially responsible and ethically aware professionals capable of contributing to sustainable economic and institutional growth.

The present research focuses on the implementation of a co-teaching model in the Organizational Behavior course for MBA students at Caucasus University. By examining this collaborative instructional design, the inquiry seeks to uncover how the integration of academic and industry perspectives progresses in practice, how students respond to this dual-format learning environment, and what broader implications emerge for the structure and delivery of business education in comparable higher education settings (García & Jaramillo, 2023; Poornachitra & Maheswari, 2023; Al-Mubarak *et al*., 2024; Harris *et al*., 2024; Weber *et al*., 2024).

The study focuses on MBA programs at Caucasus University, where the project team is actively involved in the School of Business. Their collaboration brings together a diverse range of expertise, including organizational behavior, management, innovation, and higher education trends. Dr. Yashar Ibragimov, an assistant professor at Caucasus University, specializes in organizational behavior and human resource management, with extensive experience in supply chain management and consulting in the oil and gas industry (Akbari, 2023; Antari *et al*., 2023; Fanani *et al*., 2023; Husein *et al*., 2023; Sari *et al*., 2023; Hamed *et al*., 2024; Mohammad *et al*., 2024; Verevkina *et al*., 2024). His leadership in the MBA program and his ongoing research into organizational change during digital transformation provide a strong foundation for this study. Additionally, his industry expertise contributes practical insights that complement the academic focus of the course.

With an emphasis on sustainable practices, creative management, and community entrepreneurship, Dr. Kasirye (Katongole) Fred, an assistant professor in the School of Business, provides eighteen years of academic expertise. His commitment to fusing education with entrepreneurship is in line with the study's objectives to improve business education through co-teaching, providing a theoretical framework to support Dr. Ibragimov's practical implementations.

Finally, Dr. Lamara Kadagidze, a professor at Caucasus University who has made major contributions to education administration, pedagogy, and professional communication, led this joint inquiry, with her expertise providing a strong pedagogical viewpoint. This synergy of three researchers, each providing a distinct blend of industrial and academic insights, presented an opportunity to explore the impact of co-teaching on MBA students, especially in the context of merging academic and industry perspectives.

Literature Review

Co-teaching is defined as an instructional approach in which two or more educators collaboratively guide a common group of students within the same physical or virtual classroom environment (Bacharach *et al*., 2007). This model draws upon the complementary expertise and instructional styles of multiple teachers to enrich the learning experience.

Initially rooted in special education, co-teaching emerged as a strategy to integrate students with disabilities into mainstream classrooms. These early implementations typically paired subject-area teachers with special education specialists to provide inclusive and adaptive instruction (Cook & Friend, 1995). The pedagogical rationale for co-teaching draws from Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, which emphasizes the social nature of learning. Vygotsky (1978) argued that collaborative environments support cognitive development by enabling learners to operate within their zone of proximal development. In a co-taught setting, diverse instructional inputs can offer richer scaffolding to meet students' varying learning needs.

Although traditionally associated with K–12 contexts, co-teaching has gained momentum in higher education. Bacharach, Heck, and Dahlberg (2010) noted that faculty members increasingly adopt co-teaching to enhance instructional quality and model professional collaboration. In their study, participants highlighted benefits such as improved classroom management, innovation in pedagogical practice, and more dynamic student engagement.

The rising interest in co-teaching at the university level is partly driven by evolving student demographics. As student populations grow more diverse in academic background, experience, and learning preferences, institutions are seeking instructional approaches that reflect this complexity (Helms *et al*., 2005). Co-teaching provides a means to address these diverse needs while also fostering cooperative teaching environments that mirror real-world professional interactions (Conderman & McCarty, 2003).

Recent movements toward online and blended learning, which were exacerbated by the COVID-19 epidemic, have also helped the widespread use of co-teaching. Instructors have increasingly engaged with peers or technical professionals to ensure effective digital content delivery, mirroring the collaborative dynamics of co-teaching (Hodges *et al*., 2020).

Within the sphere of business education, especially at the graduate level, co-teaching has found increasing application. The inherently applied and interdisciplinary nature of business programs provides fertile ground for collaborative instruction. Historically, MBA curricula have aimed to bridge academic theory with professional practice. While guest lectures from industry professionals have long helped to achieve this goal, a more integrated model, in which academic and industry instructors co-design and co-deliver course content, began to emerge in the early 2000s (Wenger & Hornyak, 1999).

Compared to other disciplines, MBA programs have demonstrated higher receptivity to co-teaching. Helms, Alvis, and Willis (2005) observed that students in team-taught MBA courses benefited from exposure to both conceptual frameworks and their direct application in professional contexts. This combination not only enriched students' understanding but also contributed to stronger preparation for complex decision-making environments.

Several co-teaching formats have been applied in business education. One is *parallel instruction,* where academic and industry instructors simultaneously engage different student groups, each focusing on complementary areas—for instance, theoretical underpinnings and their practical execution (Friend & Cook, 2003). Another is *alternative teaching,* in which one instructor leads the main instruction while the other supports small-group activities such as case analyses or application-based discussions. Finally, *collaborative teaching* involves both instructors participating jointly in each session, fostering interactive dialogue and merging their respective domains of expertise.

This multifaceted instructional structure presents students with a cohesive learning experience that connects conceptual knowledge to business practice. Magiera and Zigmond (2005) reported improved academic performance among students in co-taught classrooms, attributing these gains to the integration of multiple instructional styles and viewpoints. Similarly, Arshavskaya (2019) emphasized that co-teaching equips students with broader perspectives and prepares them for the interdisciplinary demands of modern professional roles.

Beyond academic gains, co-teaching contributes to the cultivation of essential soft skills. Students observe how professionals engage in constructive dialogue, resolve differences, and collaboratively make decisions. Cook and Friend (1995) underscored the benefits of this environment for nurturing teamwork, communication, and critical thinking—skills that are vital across professional domains.

Nonetheless, co-teaching is not without challenges. Some educators express concern that the involvement of non-academic professionals might result in reduced attention to theoretical rigor (Scruggs *et al*., 2007). Moreover, logistical coordination remains a significant hurdle. Harmonizing teaching schedules, planning content, and managing

assessment frameworks requires sustained communication and planning (Friend *et al*., 1993). Students, too, may face initial difficulty adjusting to differing teaching approaches and classroom dynamics (Walther-Thomas, 1997).

While co-teaching has received considerable attention in K–12 settings, scholarship focusing specifically on higher education, particularly within MBA programs, remains limited. Bacharach, Heck, and Dahlberg (2010) identified a gap in literature concerning long-term effects on students' professional outcomes. Furthermore, comparative analyses of co-teaching models within MBA curricula are scarce, highlighting a need for further empirical exploration to determine the most effective configurations of academic and industry collaboration.

Despite the increasing relevance of collaborative teaching in global educational discourse, scholarly research on co-teaching in Georgia remains scarce. Existing studies have touched upon collaboration in limited educational contexts: Kadagidze (2025) examined co-teaching within medical English instruction, demonstrating how interdisciplinary collaboration improves oral proficiency and communicative competence among non-native medical students; Malazonia *et al*. (2023) investigated the impact of collaborative teaching strategies in secondary schools, showing their contribution to fostering civic competencies and tolerance; while Papiashvili (2010) critiqued the inefficiencies of business education in Georgia, calling for closer integration between education and innovation. However, none of these studies explore co-teaching specifically within business education or at the postgraduate level. This gap underlines the urgency of scholarly inquiry into co-teaching practices in Georgian MBA programs. As contemporary educational research increasingly associates innovative pedagogies with the principles of sustainability, co-teaching can also be interpreted as a practice that supports educational continuity, ethical awareness, and lifelong learning—key dimensions of sustainable higher education. The present study addresses this gap by exploring the following research questions:

1. How is co-teaching implemented in MBA programs at Caucasus University?
2. What are the experiences and perceptions of professors and students involved in co-teaching?
3. How does co-teaching affect student engagement and learning outcomes in business education?

The following section outlines the methodology used to address the research questions posed in the study.

Materials and Methods

The investigation utilized a mixed-methods design to examine the impact of co-teaching on MBA students at Caucasus University. The approach was structured to address the three research questions outlined in the previous section, focusing on the implementation of co-teaching, the experiences of both professors and students, and the influence on student engagement and learning outcomes. The research combined both qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques, providing a holistic view of the co-teaching model from multiple perspectives. Samples of the data collection tools used in the study are provided in the appendices for reference. In addition to these qualitative and quantitative techniques, fuzzy-set Qualitative Comparative Analysis (fs/QCA) was employed as a complementary analytical strategy to explore configurations of conditions—such as theoretical instruction, practical engagement, and student interaction—associated with enhanced learning outcomes.

Quantitative data was gathered by pre- and post-course surveys, which were administered at the halfway point and end of the course. These surveys assessed students' comprehension of the course material and any changes in their participation throughout the course of the program. The qualitative data were acquired through semi-structured interviews with co-teachers and focus group discussions with students. These qualitative methodologies enabled a thorough examination of the co-teaching experience, exposing the pedagogical strategies used, the incorporation of industry expertise, and the overall efficacy of the program. By combining qualitative and quantitative data, the study sought to triangulate findings and provide a thorough analysis of the impact of co-teaching on MBA students.

The participants in this study were MBA students and faculty members engaged in the co-taught Organizational Behavior course in the School of Business at Caucasus University.

- **Students:** The study included all 39 students enrolled in the Organizational Behavior course during the Spring semester of the 2024–2025 academic year. There was no random sampling involved, as these students represented the entire MBA cohort within the School of Business. Participation in the research was voluntary and conducted

with full informed consent, adhering to ethical research standards. The students completed surveys at two points: at the midpoint (after the theory-based instruction had been completed, but before the industry expert took over) and at the end of the course. These surveys assessed their learning progress, engagement levels, and understanding of organizational behavior concepts, as well as their perceptions of the co-teaching model. Additionally, 10 students participated in focus group discussions, offering deeper qualitative insights into their experiences with the co-teaching approach.

- **Faculty:** The teaching team consisted of Dr. Fred Kasirye and Dr. Yashar Ibragimov. Dr. Kasirye, a specialist in community entrepreneurship and sustainable practices, led the theoretical portion of the course, focusing on core organizational behavior concepts. Dr. Ibragimov, an expert in organizational behavior and human resource management, with extensive experience in supply chain management and consulting in the oil and gas industry, served as the industry specialist, providing practical insights and real-world case studies. Dr. Kasirye taught the first part of the course, while Dr. Ibragimov took over for the second part, integrating industry expertise. Dr. Fred and Dr. Ibragimov were selected for their complementary roles: Dr. Fred brought academic rigor, while Dr. Ibragimov contributed practical, real-world industry experience. Both professors participated in semi-structured interviews to explore their pedagogical strategies, the integration of academic and industry knowledge, the challenges encountered, and their evaluation of the co-teaching model's effectiveness. The rationale behind selecting these two specific faculty members for the investigation is explained in the *Urgency or Contextual Justification* section of the *introduction* above for reference.

Course Details: The MBA program at Caucasus University's School of Business included an organizational behavior course. It was held during the spring semester of the 2024-2025 academic year and lasted 12 weeks, with a total of 36 hours of instruction. The course was co-taught by two professors with different academic and professional backgrounds, resulting in a mix of theoretical knowledge and practical industrial insights. The first half of the course, led by Dr. Kasirye, focused on key theoretical ideas of organizational behavior, while the second half, taught by Dr. Ibragimov, stressed real-world implementations of these concepts in industrial settings.

Data Collection Tools: To answer the research questions, the following data collection tools were utilized:

- **Pre- and Post-Course Surveys**: Administered at the midpoint (before the industry expert took over) and at the course's conclusion, these surveys assessed students' grasp of organizational behavior concepts and their ability to apply them in real-world contexts. The surveys included both Likert-scale questions and open-ended responses to capture students' reflections on their learning experience.
- **Semi-Structured Interviews with Co-Teachers**: Interviews with Dr. Kasirye and Dr. Ibragimov provided insights into their pedagogical strategies, the integration of academic and industry knowledge, the challenges encountered, and their evaluation of the co-teaching model's effectiveness.
- **Focus Group Discussions with Students**: Focus groups were conducted to gain a deeper understanding of students' experiences with the co-teaching model. Discussions focused on how the integration of academic and industry perspectives shaped students' comprehension of organizational behavior and their ability to apply the knowledge in practical settings.
- **Course Materials and Content Analysis**: A detailed examination of the course syllabus, teaching materials, and assessments was performed to evaluate how the co-teaching model influenced the structure and content of the course. Special attention was given to the incorporation of real-world case studies, practical exercises, and the blending of academic knowledge with industry insights. The excerpt from the course syllabus, with practitioner-led segments marked in color, is included in the appendices for reference.

Data analysis: To assess the impact of co-teaching on student learning outcomes in the Organizational Behavior course, both quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed using a mixed-methods design. The integration of survey data, focus group discussions, course material review, and semi-structured interviews provided a comprehensive picture of the effects of the co-teaching model. Additionally, fuzzy-set Qualitative Comparative Analysis (fs/QCA) was used to identify meaningful configurations of teaching conditions associated with successful learning outcomes.

Results and Discussion

Quantitative Results: Key Survey Findings

The quantitative data offer insight into students' knowledge, expectations, and perceived learning gains throughout the co-teaching experience. The following tables **(Tables 1–5)** present core results from the pre- and post-course surveys conducted with all 39 students.

Table 1 presents the baseline data on students' prior exposure to organizational behavior, confidence in the subject, and engagement levels before the industry specialist's participation.

Table 1. Students' Baseline Knowledge and Perception at Midpoint

Survey Item	Response Category	%
Prior exposure to OB	Yes	74.4%
Confidence in prior OB knowledge (rated 3 or above on 5-point scale)	Yes	59.4%
Engagement in theoretical lectures	Moderate (3/5)	45.9%
Engagement in theoretical lectures	Low (2/5)	29.7%
Real-world examples encountered before midpoint	Yes	46.2%
Real-world examples helpful	**Yes**	**77.3%**

These results suggest that while a majority of students had prior exposure to OB, their initial confidence and engagement levels were moderate to low. Real-world examples were already recognized as helpful even before the industry expert's involvement.

Table 2 outlines students' expectations regarding the industry expert's contributions prior to their participation in the second half of the course.

Table 2. Expectations from Industry Expert (Midpoint Survey)

Contribution Expected	% of Students Endorsing
Practical insights	82.1%
Case studies	79.5%
Problem-solving skills	76.9%
Industry trends	**79.5%**

Expectations for the industry expert were high across all categories, with students particularly anticipating practical insights and problem-solving enhancement.

Table 3 summarizes post-course self-assessments from students, focusing on their understanding of OB concepts and ability to apply them in practice.

Table 3. Learning Outcomes after Co-Teaching (Post-Course Survey)

Indicator	%
Rated OB understanding at 4 or 5 (5-point scale)	94.9%
Rated OB understanding as highest (5/5)	59.0%
Confidence in applying OB concepts in real life	100%
Students applying OB concepts during course	**100%**

Post-course data reveal a strong positive impact of the co-teaching format. Students reported increased confidence and demonstrated improved ability to apply theoretical knowledge in real-world scenarios.

Table 4 presents data on the specific skills students reported improving through the co-teaching experience.

Table 4. Skills Improved through Co-Teaching

Skill Gained	% of Students
Problem-solving	89.7%
Practical OB applications	87.2%
Workplace dynamics understanding	61.5%
Leadership/decision-making insights	59.0%
Ethical guidance / career advice	**48.7%**

Problem-solving and real-world applications were the most frequently cited gains, followed by improved understanding of team dynamics and leadership.

Table 5 reports student satisfaction with the co-teaching model, as well as remaining concerns or challenges they identified by the end of the course.

Table 5. Students' Satisfaction and Challenges

Indicator	%
Expectations from industry expert met	100%
Reported remaining challenges with OB concepts	20.5%
Rated integration of academic and industry content as effective	40%
Rated integration as lacking cohesion	**40%**

While satisfaction with the industry expert was unanimous, the mixed responses on content integration indicate room for improved coordination between academic and professional components.

Qualitative Insights: Themes from Focus Groups and Interviews

The qualitative data add depth to the survey findings. They were drawn from student focus group discussions, interviews with the academic and industry instructors, and analysis of course materials. The themes below reflect recurring patterns in how students and instructors perceived the benefits and limitations of the co-teaching model.

- **Theory–Practice Connection**: Students consistently emphasized that co-teaching deepened their understanding of OB by contextualizing theoretical models through real-world examples. Co-teachers also affirmed that this dual instruction allowed for a seamless translation of abstract concepts into practical scenarios.
- **Engagement**: Interactive formats such as simulations, debates, and team-based activities improved engagement and conceptual retention. Course materials—especially instructor-designed assignments and application-based tasks—reflected the integration of real-world problems and decision-making frameworks.
- **Live Modeling of Collaboration**: The co-teachers themselves served as a visible demonstration of the organizational behavior principles they taught. Interviews revealed that students observed live examples of negotiation, conflict resolution, and mutual respect, which reinforced classroom concepts.
- **Instructional Gaps and Integration Challenges**: Both students and co-instructors noted a lack of full coordination at times. Transitions between instructors could be abrupt, and a few topics lacked cohesion. Students recommended that more sessions be jointly delivered or co-facilitated to provide continuity.
- **Pedagogical Tools and Content Review**: Analysis of teaching materials showed the structured use of case studies (e.g., Apple, IKEA), role-play simulations (e.g., conflict resolution, change management), and frameworks like Kotter's model. These were aligned with intended learning outcomes and highly rated in student feedback.
- **Fieldwork Value**: Focus group participants highlighted company visits (Bank of Georgia, TBC Bank, Silknet) as transformative. These visits bridged classroom theory with actual leadership and team practices, affirming the value of co-teaching that integrates industry partners.

To investigate how different teaching aspects interact to yield learning outcomes, fs/QCA-inspired logic was utilized to identify condition configurations. These combinations indicate which characteristics, when present together, are related to the biggest improvements in knowledge, confidence, and skill acquisition.

Table 6 displays the four dominant configurations observed in the course.

Table 6. Core Configurations Associated with Positive Outcomes

Conditions	Understanding Improved	Confidence Increased	Skills Gained
Academic foundation + Industry examples + Interactive learning	✓	✓	✓
Theoretical lectures only	✗	✗	✗
Case studies + Field visits	✓	✓	✓
Weak coordination between co-teachers	✗	**✓ (partial)**	**✓ (partial)**

Interpretation: Learning gains were consistently high when industry application was embedded and academic theory was reinforced through interactive practice. Weak coordination hindered full learning potential but did not eliminate value.

The fs/QCA-inspired summary offers a preliminary view of causally relevant combinations that enhance student outcomes. These findings provide a foundation for more extensive future research applying set-theoretic logic in educational settings.

The findings from the study shed light on the critical role of integrating academic theory with industry practice in higher education, particularly within the Georgian context. As Georgia's higher education system continues to evolve, there is an increasing demand for curricula that not only deliver theoretical knowledge but also provide practical, real-world applications. The co-teaching model employed in this study at Caucasus University (CU) serves as a promising approach to filling the void, demonstrating its potential to enhance both student engagement and learning outcomes. However, the insights gained from the study also mark several key considerations for future rounds of the co-teaching model at CU and beyond in Georgia's academic landscape.

In Georgia, higher education institutions are actively reforming curricula to better prepare students for the competitive and dynamic labor market (Mitaishvili-Rayyis, 2023; Kadagidze, 2024; Kadagidze, 2025). The growing integration of industry professionals into academic settings, as observed in this study at CU, reflects a broader trend towards improving the employability of graduates. Yet, while academic rigor is crucial, there is an emerging recognition that students need more than just foundational theoretical knowledge; they must also develop the practical skills and industry insights necessary to thrive in their careers.

The co-teaching paradigm fosters a collaborative, flexible, and inclusive learning environment, all of which are critical for long-term educational resilience from the perspective of sustainability in education. The paradigm fosters morally conscious and reflective learners who can support responsible leadership and sustainable organizational practices by bringing together a variety of professional viewpoints.

The present study highlights the importance of strengthening the link between theory and practice in the classroom. While Georgian universities, including CU, are increasingly adopting innovative teaching methods such as co-teaching, it is essential to continue refining these models to ensure they meet the demands of a rapidly evolving labor market. The findings suggest that although students benefit from the involvement of industry experts, there is still room for improvement in aligning academic and practical teaching components. Enhancing coordination between instructors will support a more integrated learning experience, ultimately enriching students' preparation for professional roles.

One of the strengths of the co-teaching model in this study was its emphasis on real-world application. The involvement of industry professionals and field visits to leading organizations provided CU students with valuable exposure to current workplace practices. This practical experience is critical, particularly in Georgia, where many students transition directly from academia into employment. As the labor market becomes more competitive, universities like CU must prioritize equipping students with the skills needed to succeed in complex organizational

environments. The use of case studies, guest lectures, and company visits made organizational behavior concepts more tangible and relevant—a practice that should be further institutionalized.

Despite its successes, a persistent challenge related to the synchronization between academic theory and industry practice emerged. Student feedback highlighted the need for more cohesive collaboration between academic instructors and industry experts. While the dual-instructor approach offered valuable perspectives, some CU students felt that the integration of the two components lacked consistency. This issue is particularly relevant in Georgia, where the higher education system often faces challenges related to resource allocation, curriculum design, and alignment of academic objectives with industry needs (Narmania *et al*., 2022; Lezhava, 2024).

However, the fs/QCA-inspired findings also illuminated the importance of instructional harmony. Configurations where theoretical lectures were not coupled with practice-oriented tasks yielded weak learning outcomes, emphasizing that the success of co-teaching is contingent upon well-aligned, complementary roles between academic and industry actors.

To address this, universities in Georgia, including CU, should prioritize fostering closer collaboration between faculty members and industry partners. Joint planning sessions, shared syllabi, and collaborative teaching strategies would ensure that theoretical and practical course elements are better integrated. The development of more interactive, real-time industry problem-solving tasks could further narrow these gaps and help students apply their knowledge in an academic setting.

In sustainability-oriented teacher education, such practices exemplify how higher education can maintain pedagogical continuity and institutional adaptability. Co-teaching serves as a scalable model for sustainable curriculum design, supporting lifelong learning, cross-sectoral partnerships, and the cultivation of sustainability competencies such as critical thinking, systems understanding, and ethical responsibility.

The long-term implications of this study for Georgia's higher education system lie in its potential to improve student outcomes in terms of both employability and professional readiness. By incorporating more industry-relevant content into academic courses, universities like CU can ensure that students are not only equipped with theoretical knowledge but also the practical tools needed to succeed in the workforce. This dual focus on academic rigor and application is essential for helping Georgia's graduates stand out in an increasingly competitive global job market.

Moreover, the study's findings indicate that students at CU value learning from industry professionals, suggesting that such programs could play a central role in shaping the future of higher education in Georgia. As more institutions integrate industry practice into academic instruction, it will be crucial for universities to evaluate and refine their co-teaching models regularly, ensuring alignment with both student needs and labor market demands.

Ultimately, co-teaching reinforces the sustainability of higher education itself by fostering interconnectedness between academia, industry, and society. It advances education for sustainable development by embedding cooperation, adaptability, and continuous improvement within teaching practice—key dimensions that ensure educational institutions remain relevant and socially responsive in the long term.

Limitations

While the study provides insights into the implementation of co-teaching within the School of Business at Caucasus University, several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings.

First, the voluntary nature of survey participation resulted in incomplete responses, which may not fully represent the perspectives of all students and introduces potential response bias. Second, the reliance on self-reported data from surveys and interviews raises concerns regarding subjectivity and social desirability effects, despite efforts to ensure anonymity.

Third, the study is limited to a single cohort of 39 students within one academic program and course, restricting the generalizability of the findings to broader educational contexts. Differences in institutional settings, disciplines, and student backgrounds may yield different outcomes.

Additionally, the involvement of a limited number of industry partners constrains the diversity of practical perspectives presented, while instructor insights reflect only the experiences of two co-teachers. The study's short-term design, conducted over a single semester, further limits the ability to assess long-term impacts on student learning and professional development.

These limitations highlight the need for broader, longitudinal, and multi-context research to better understand the effectiveness and sustainability of co-teaching models in higher education.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and limitations, the following recommendations are proposed for future research and institutional practice in co-teaching within higher education contexts such as Georgia.

For Future Researchers

Future research should look at the long-term impact of co-teaching using longitudinal designs, measuring its influence on career growth, knowledge retention, and the continuous application of professional skills within a sustainability framework. Extending research across disciplines, institutions, and nations would improve generalizability and provide comparative insights into the adaptation of co-teaching approaches.

Further investigation into different co-teaching formats, including interdisciplinary and multi-instructor approaches, may clarify how structural variations affect learning outcomes and collaboration. Research should also explore the role of real-time industry-based projects in strengthening practical engagement, as well as the contribution of digital technologies to facilitating flexible and scalable academic–industry collaboration (Adiga *et al*., 2023; Haoujar *et al*., 2023; Merzouki *et al*., 2023; Nikolenko *et al*., 2023; Paritala, 2023; Su *et al*., 2023; Bukke *et al*., 2024; Ding *et al*., 2024).

Finally, greater attention should be given to instructor preparation, particularly training models that enhance coordination, collaboration, and student-centered delivery between academic and industry participants, thereby supporting the sustainability of teaching practices.

For Practitioners and Institutions

Higher education institutions should prioritize strategic pairing of academic and industry instructors, supported by joint planning and curriculum co-design to ensure coherence between theoretical and applied components. The integration of fieldwork, case studies, and real-world problem-solving tasks should be further institutionalized to enhance student engagement and relevance.

Continuous improvement mechanisms, including systematic student feedback, are essential for refining co-teaching practices in response to evolving educational and labor market demands. Investment in faculty development is also critical, as co-teaching requires specific competencies in collaboration and interdisciplinary communication.

All things considered, co-teaching ought to be acknowledged as a viable educational approach that fosters flexibility, moral accountability, and long-term significance in higher education via enhanced cooperation between academics and business.

Conclusion

The present study explored the effectiveness of the co-teaching model in the context of an organizational behavior course at Caucasus University (CU), a higher education institution in Georgia, with particular emphasis on integrating academic theory with real-world industry practices. Using a combination of quantitative and qualitative data—including surveys, focus group discussions, and interviews—the research underscored the positive influence of industry collaboration on student learning outcomes.

Findings showed a notable improvement in students' understanding of organizational behavior concepts following their exposure to industry professionals and applied case studies. The dual-instructor approach, which combined academic rigor with practical insights, effectively enhanced student engagement, fostered critical thinking and problem-solving skills, and helped bridge the gap between theory and practice.

Nonetheless, the study identified challenges in aligning academic and industry perspectives, highlighting the importance of improved coordination between co-instructors to optimize the learning experience. The value of continuous course revision, based on student feedback, also emerged as essential for sustaining relevance and engagement. Students' enthusiasm for real-world applications—including field visits and case-based learning—reflects the increasing need to align academic content with evolving professional expectations.

Viewed through the lens of sustainable education, this co-teaching model demonstrates how universities can strengthen long-term pedagogical resilience and institutional sustainability. By fostering collaboration, adaptability, and ethical awareness, it contributes to the creation of learning environments that prepare graduates not only for employability but also for responsible and sustainable leadership in organizational contexts.

Importantly, the study's use of fs/QCA-inspired logic revealed that learning outcomes were strongest when academic instruction, industry engagement, and interactive formats were present together, emphasizing the value of coherent, well-integrated instructional design.

While this research offers meaningful insights into the co-teaching model's potential, it also acknowledges its limitations, such as voluntary survey participation, potential response bias, and contextual boundaries. The study focused on a single course within one institution in Georgia, which may limit the generalizability of its findings to broader educational contexts.

In conclusion, this research reinforces the promise of co-teaching in improving educational quality and relevance, particularly within organizational behavior courses at CU's School of Business. It highlights the need for continued refinement of instructional collaboration and deeper integration of industry perspectives to better prepare students for the complexities of the modern workforce. As a sustainability-oriented pedagogical practice, co-teaching ensures that educational processes remain adaptive, ethically grounded, and responsive to global challenges, embodying the principles of education for sustainable development. Future research should explore co-teaching across diverse disciplines and settings while addressing methodological limitations through broader, more systematic data collection and analysis of student needs and preferences.

Generative AI statement

The authors confirm that this manuscript is wholly original and contains no instances of plagiarism. All referenced materials and sources have been properly acknowledged. AI-assisted tools (specifically, ChatGPT by OpenAI) were utilized solely to improve language clarity and formatting. These tools were not used for content generation or analytical input. The entirety of the intellectual and interpretive work is the exclusive responsibility of the authors.

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Ethics Statement: The studies involving human participants were reviewed and approved by the Caucasus University Research Ethics Committee. Participation in this study was entirely voluntary, and all participants provided their written informed consent prior to data collection. Students were informed of the purpose of the study, assured of the confidentiality of their responses, and were given the right to withdraw at any time without penalty. No personally identifiable information was collected, and all data were anonymized and used solely for academic research purposes in accordance with institutional ethical guidelines. The research also adhered to principles of sustainable scholarship by ensuring transparency, inclusivity, and long-term educational benefit through ethically responsible inquiry.

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