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RESEARCH ON THE BENEFITS, PROBLEMS, AND COUNTERMEASURES OF CHINA'S DISTANCE EDUCATION FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF ECONOMICS

Research article

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Abstract

With the continuous deepening of China's reform and opening up and the development of modern information technology, China's distance education has achieved a pretty good and rapid development and achieved "internet +", but there are also some problems that cannot be ignored. During the pandemic, the Ministry of Education of China put forward the guidance of "stopping classes but not stopping learning, stopping classes but not stopping teaching". After the offline suspension of classes, a large number of training institutions and schools turned to online teaching. The epidemic has indirectly cultivated people's habit of accepting online education, which has played a great role in promoting the popularization of distance education. China's distance education ushered in important development opportunities but also faced unprecedented challenges. Distance education which is the booster of education is characterized by low cost, autonomy, flexibility, sharing, and so on, its development is very important, urgent, and promising; however, if it is not managed in a more standardized way to ensure the quality of education, it may become a legitimate tool for selling diplomas in disguised form, and it will hinder the progress of education. From the perspective of economics, this article firstly states the benefits of China's distance education, then analyzes the problems existing in China's distance education, and finally proposes corresponding countermeasures, aiming at providing reference for relevant departments and promoting the high-quality and efficient development of China's education.

Keywords: China's distance education, benefits, problems, countermeasures.

ИССЛЕДОВАНИЕ ПРЕИМУЩЕСТВ, ПРОБЛЕМ И МЕР ПРОТИВОДЕЙСТВИЯ ДИСТАНЦИОННОМУ ОБРАЗОВАНИЮ В КИТАЕ С ЭКОНОМИЧЕСКОЙ ТОЧКИ ЗРЕНИЯ

Научная статья

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Аннотация

Благодаря постоянному усилению реформ, открытости Китая и развитию современных информационных технологий, китайское дистанционное образование достигло достаточно высокого и быстрого развития и получило статус «Интернет +», но при этом возникают некоторые проблемы, которые нельзя игнорировать. Во время пандемии Министерство образования Китая разработало рекомендации «прекратить занятия, но не прекращать обучение, прекратить занятия, но не прекращать преподавание». После приостановки занятий в автономном режиме большое количество учебных заведений и школ перешли на онлайн-обучение. Эпидемия косвенно воспитала в людях привычку к онлайн-образованию, что сыграло большую роль в его популяризации. Китайское дистанционное образование открыло широкие возможности для развития, но также столкнулось с беспрецедентными проблемами. Дистанционное образование, которое является стимулятором обучения, характеризуется низкой стоимостью, автономностью, гибкостью, совместным использованием и прочим, его развитие очень важно, актуально и перспективно; однако, если оно не будет управляться более унифицированным способом для обеспечения качества образования, оно может стать узаконенным инструментом для продажи дипломов в завуалированной форме, что мешает прогрессу образования. С точки зрения экономики, в данной статье сначала говорится о преимуществах китайского дистанционного образования, затем анализируются проблемы, существующие в китайском дистанционном образовании, и, наконец, предлагаются соответствующие меры противодействия, направленные на предоставление рекомендаций для соответствующих ведомств и содействия высококачественному и эффективному развитию образования в Китае.

Ключевые слова: дистанционное образование Китая, преимущества, проблемы, методы противодействия.

Introduction

The benefits of distance education

1.1. Realize the sharing of education resources

First of all, in some poor and remote areas of China, where the excellent teachers are a little few and the education resources are scarce, the education resources can be shared through distance education, so the local educated can enjoy high-quality education resources, which is conducive to achieving education poverty alleviation, promoting education equity, and implementing the strategy of rejuvenating the country through science and education. Secondly, the state encourages cooperation among institutions of higher learning, between institutions of higher learning and scientific research institutions, as well as between enterprises and institutions, to complement each other's advantages and improve the efficiency of the use of educational resources [1], the application of distance education to realize the sharing of educational resources is exactly what

the state encourages. Thirdly, apply modern information technology to focus on distance education in relevant colleges and universities, especially through the sharing of high-quality education resources such as famous teachers, famous experts, famous schools, famous courses, and others [2] to build a digital, intelligent, and integrated distance education platform, strengthen the interaction and communication between teachers and students, and promote the mutual selection and recognition of courses between colleges and universities, it can achieve "anytime and anywhere" learning. Finally, rely on the distance education platform to realize the all-round sharing of teachers, courses, facilities, data, and so on, which is conducive to speeding up the construction of the national credit bank (national qualification framework) and the credit recognition system and standards [3].

1.2. Meet the needs of social development

The state supports the implementation of higher education through radio, television, correspondence, and other distance education methods [1]. Digital online education is a supplement and extension of school education and classroom teaching [2], therefore, distance education is an important and indispensable education method. Distance education referred to in this article is broadly defined and refers to the teaching mode using communication media such as television and the internet. It breaks through the boundaries of time and space and is different from the traditional teaching mode of school accommodations. It can not only meet the learning needs of students in school but also the learning needs of administrative organs, institutions, enterprises, social organizations, civil organizations, rural areas, military and other personnel of all kinds for various certificates, continuing education, professional skills, and even the needs of re-employment training of laid-off workers, induction training, entrepreneurship training, and so on. By providing learning support services through distance education, "everyone can learn" is realized, which greatly facilitates the educated and meets the needs of social development.

1.3. Promote the cost reduction and efficiency increase of education

Distance education can promote the reduction of education costs and the improvement of efficiency. Distance education has a certain degree of autonomy and flexibility, it does not require schools to provide classrooms, nor does it require teachers or students to take classes in the classroom, which greatly saves the cost of the classroom and the transportation costs of teachers and students to and from the classroom. Compared with the limited number of students that can be accommodated in the classroom, distance education does not limit the number of students, and the courses can be played and spread repeatedly, which greatly reduces the cost of education and facilitates teachers and students. In addition, applying the saved transportation time to the teaching of teachers and the learning of students, respectively, also saves opportunity costs and improves their efficiency.

1.4. Improve the development of educational technology

The rapid development of modern information technology, especially the development of 5G, big data, artificial intelligence, and other high-tech and new technologies in recent years, has made qualitative changes in the means of distance education. Modern distance education needs to transmit courses to the educated through audio, video (live or recorded), and computer technology, including real-time and non-real-time. The development of distance education will be better with the support of science and technology. In turn, the huge demand for science and technology generated to support the development of distance education has also led to the application and development of computer technology, multimedia technology, communication technology, and other high-tech and new technologies, as well as related software and hardware equipment. Distance education has greatly fertilized the development of educational technology-related industries.

The existing problems in distance education in China

2.1. The relevant legal systems and policies need to be improved

Firstly, at present, the Higher Education Law of the People's Republic of China only encourages distance education, but the importance and role of distance education cannot be strongly guaranteed by law. Diplomas obtained through distance education are not highly recognized and are even discriminated against. For example, the National Open University takes distance education as its main teaching method, although it is a regular university that has developed for decades directly under the Ministry of Education, it does not yet have the right to run postgraduate education, its university status is weak, and the degree of recognition is low. Secondly, the institutionalized construction of the quality assurance system for distance education needs to be strengthened. Due to the rapid development of distance education in China, the rules and regulations for the institutionalized construction of the original quality assurance system have not met the development requirements of the current era [4], and the specifications are low, the content is incomplete, and the operability is not strong. Thirdly, distance education lacks supporting basic systems and standard systems. At present, the main situation is that the National Open University has formed a new model of "internet + education" in the pilot project of "exploring the construction model of the open university" [3] for nearly ten years, and there are no ready-made rules and regulations to refer to, while the development of distance education is developing and changing rapidly, some systems or standards can only be accelerated. Fourthly, most of the policies on distance education are restrictive, with insufficient innovation, not strong operability, weak supervision and accountability mechanisms, and inadequate policy implementation [5].

2.2. The regional development is unbalanced

Although distance education can realize the sharing of high-quality education resources and create favorable conditions for promoting education equity and balanced regional development, due to China's vast territory and regional differences, distance education itself has the problem of uneven regional development. First of all, the differences in economic development have caused the uneven development of distance education in different regions. In the southeast coastal area, where the economy is well-developed, the network infrastructure is good, and there are a large number of excellent teachers gathered there, the development level of education is relatively high, while the economy in the central and western regions is relatively poor, and the infrastructure and teachers are relatively weak, which determines that the development level of distance education in the southeast coastal area is higher than that in the central and western regions. Secondly, cultural differences have led to uneven regional development of distance education. People in the central and western regions are relatively conservative, they are very

different from those in the southeast coastal areas in ideas, and they are not very willing to invest in acquiring a diploma through distance education. Finally, the uneven distribution of distance education pilot universities and outlets [6] has led to the uneven development of distance education regions. More than half of the colleges and universities that can provide distance higher education in China are distributed in the southeast coastal areas and large cities, especially in Beijing and Shanghai, which are densely distributed and occupy a relatively large proportion, while they are less distributed in the central and western regions and non-provincial capital cities, as shown in the table 1 below. Similarly, as an institution of higher learning that mainly carries out distance education, the educational resources of the National Open University are mainly concentrated in Beijing headquarters and provincial capitals, while the distribution in remote areas is less.

Table 1 - Regional distribution proportion of 68 modern distance education pilot universities in China

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Region name	Number of pilot universities	Proportion, %
Beijing	18	26.47
Shanghai	7	10.29
Sichuan	6	8.82
Hubei	5	7.35
Liaoning	4	5.88
Shaanxi	4	5.88
Jiangsu	3	4.41
Guangdong	3	4.41
Tianjin	2	2.94
Jilin	2	2.94
Heilongjiang	2	2.94
Fujian	2	2.94
Shandong	2	2.94
Hunan	2	2.94
Chongqing	2	2.94
Zhejiang	1	1.47
Anhui	1	1.47
Henan	1	1.47
Gansu	1	1.47
In total	68	100.00

Note: own development on the basis of the list of 68 modern distance education pilot universities in China which comes from the official website of the Ministry of Education of China

2.3. The specialty settings are not scientific

The survey and research found that the kinds and disciplines of specialties set up in distance higher education are rich and meet most of the employment needs of the society, but there are also some problems, such as the fact that the specialties tend to be the same, the specialties are lack of characteristics [7], the specialties are inadequate, and so on. For example, in the undergraduate majors (direction) of the National Open University starting from junior college majors, the majors related to Chinese language are divided into four majors: Chinese language and literature, Chinese language and literature (normal direction), Chinese language and Chinese international education; the majors related to marketing in the junior college majors (direction) are divided into six majors: marketing, marketing (marketing and planning direction), marketing (market development and marketing direction), automobile marketing and service, tea art and tea marketing (tea review and marketing direction), tea art and tea marketing (tea culture direction), which are the same in essentials while differing in minor points, approaching the same; nursing, health management, social work, social work (for the elderly), community management and service, elderly service and management, domestic service and management and other majors should be their dominant majors, but due to the low quality, these specialties have not been made brands, and they lack characteristics; the “stuck neck” specialties such as microelectronics and chips, the “fashionable” specialties such as artificial intelligence, big data and cloud computing, and the new specialties such as intelligent manufacturing, intelligent medical care and non-contact economy, which are urgently needed by the society, cannot be cultivated due to the lack of cultivation ability [8], and it is difficult to meet the diversified needs of the society.

2.4. The enrollment market is chaotic frequently

Although the National Open University and the colleges and universities participating in the distance education pilot have good social reputation and the education department has issued the early warning of college online education enrollment for many times, there are still some institutions and individuals falsely use the name of the National Open University and relevant

colleges and universities to publish online education related to the headquarters, branches, colleges, learning centers of the National Open University running organization system or pilot colleges and universities through the network and other media, such as “no threshold for admission”, “no need to take classes”, “exemption from or guarantee of passing the exam”, “get a diploma quickly”, “no barrier to obtaining a diploma”, “there are answers to the exams”, “refund for failing to pass the exam”, “guarantee the passage of the thesis”, “guarantee the graduation” and other false enrollment publicity and advertising [9]. In addition, the competition in the distance education enrollment market is fierce and commercialized seriously. Because there is no enrollment index limit, in order to attract more students, the competition among the enrollment outlets is fierce, and some of the institutions they cooperate with are profit-oriented, and their utilitarianism is serious, which may exaggerate the propaganda, leading to vicious competition.

2.5. The teaching management is inadequate

The teaching management of distance education are not in place in many aspects. Firstly, the teaching management methods of distance education in some colleges and universities are not standardized and scientific. Secondly, even though the teaching management methods of distance education in relevant colleges and universities are standardized and scientific, there are still some colleges and universities that have not strictly implemented the system, which exists in the name only, such as some teachers who are responsible for the curriculum are not responsible for the lack of teaching services and management of the curriculum, pay no attention to the attendance of students and don't ask if there are late arrivals, early departures, or even a few absenteeism. Thirdly, the supervision of the learning process is not in place. Some students may obtain learning records through “brush class” and “replace class” by means of lending their personal learning accounts to others, using illegal software, or entrusting a third party to provide manual or technical services. Fourthly, the supervision of the examination is not in place, the examination results are obtained through “brush examination” and “substitute examination” in the same way as the above “brush class” and “replace class” or the contents and answers of the course examination are disseminated in the examination [10]. Fifthly, the management of some off-campus learning centers is not standardized. Most of the distance education pilot colleges and universities will authorize the off-campus learning centers to carry out relevant auxiliary management and support services on enrollment, teaching, student management, and other links to online education in accordance with their unified requirements and work arrangements. While the off-campus learning centers are educational service institutions, with weak management and insufficient supervision. It is worth noting that the inadequate teaching management will lead to the difficulty in implementing the teaching work, and if the management of the quality of distance education courses is neglected, then using distance education to carry out teaching will only be a process and the quality of education will be difficult to guarantee.

The countermeasures to solve the existing problems of China's distance education

3.1. Improve relevant legal systems and policies

Firstly, we should pay more attention to the legislation of distance education and conduct in-depth research, investigate and study the current situation and the legislation current situation of distance education, grasp the objective reality, find out the existing problems and analyze their reasons, find the corresponding solutions, and provide the content and basis for formulating policies or legislation, at the same time, we should study the necessity of distance education legislation, widely solicit the opinions of experts and the public, analyze and estimate the actual situation realistically, and distinguish the effectiveness and level of legislation. Secondly, the policy should strengthen the recognition of distance education. Government units, central enterprises, and state-owned enterprises should treat graduates who obtain academic qualifications through distance education equally in terms of job interview, talent treatment, professional title evaluation, civil service examination, and public institution examination. Thirdly, the policy should strengthen the support for distance education, support the National Open University to improve its status and influence in universities, and encourage it to apply for the right to run postgraduate education and carry out international education. Fourthly, we should strengthen the institutionalized construction of the quality assurance system of distance education, and establish scientific and standardized rules and regulations with clear levels, high specifications, complete content, and strong operability in keeping with the times. The training objectives and requirements of distance education students, the difficulty of the final examination of the course, and the difficulty of graduation should not be reduced. Fifthly, we should actively study and accelerate the construction of various supporting basic and standard systems of distance education, and carry out the pilot project successfully before comprehensively promoting it. The sixth is that we should realistically formulate innovative and easy-to-implement distance education policies to meet current social needs. The seventh is strengthening the construction of the supervision and accountability system to ensure the timely implementation of policies.

3.2. Increase investment in weak areas

Firstly, increase the investment in the construction of distance education infrastructure in weak areas [6] to ensure that each district and city has distance education outlets and can meet the acceptance standards and normal management requirements. Secondly, the National Open Universities or pilot colleges and universities should rely on the infrastructure and teachers of local universities to establish distance education learning centers or outlets and strengthen cooperation in enrollment and teaching management. Thirdly, local governments in weak regions should increase support for distance education, encourage and support excellent teachers and distance education talents to take root in the region by introducing talents and improving treatment. Fourthly, the enrollment policy should be inclined toward the central and western regions, encourage students from remote and poor areas, especially those from rural poor areas, and give them certain support and tuition reductions. Fifthly, strengthen guidance and support for distance education graduates in weak areas in employment and entrepreneurship.

3.3. Optimize the structure of specialties

The education department and relevant colleges and universities should carry out in-depth investigations and research to find out the current employment market situation and social needs, and then optimize the structure of specialties in combination with the established majors. Firstly, appropriately reduce or cancel the almost same majors. For majors with no

essential difference but almost the same teaching content but different names, the better one should be selected. Secondly, expand the number of majors to meet diversified needs. For new professions emerging in the job market or urgently needed majors that have not yet existed, new majors should be actively innovated to open, and some offline mature majors that can complete teaching tasks through distance education can also be transplanted. Thirdly, cultivate characteristic majors, cultivate a group of high-quality graduates through strengthening the faculty and assessment training, and expand employment channels to make them obtain employment with high salaries, so as to create a brand in the market and build a reputation in the society. Fourth, strengthen the regular inspection and supervision of the specialty setting to ensure that it is scientific and standardized. Fifthly, keep pace with the times to cater to the employment market, update and add new majors in time, there should be a moderate number of relevant majors with cold employment, and a moderate increase in relevant majors with hot employment [7].

3.4. Rectify the order of the enrollment market

Firstly, the education department and relevant colleges and universities should adhere to the principle of updating and releasing enrollment information every year and issuing clarification statements in time to prevent students and parents from being cheated. Secondly, the market supervision department and the public security department should strengthen the investigation and punishment, and strictly investigate the legal or criminal responsibility [9] of the relevant institutions and individuals who forge, spread rumors, or propagate false enrollment propaganda by means of the network, WeChat, microblog, TikTok, SMS, and other media in the name of the fake pilot university or the National Open University. Thirdly, arrange enrollment outlets rationally and strengthen cooperative enrollment with local schools. Fourthly, we should expand enrollment publicity, smooth enrollment contact information and online enrollment channels, and reduce dependence on intermediary agencies. Fifthly, strengthen the management and supervision of cooperation institutions, cancel the cooperation with illegal institutions in time, and announce it timely. The sixth is to set up a reporting and reward mechanism for illegal enrollment and false publicity, and unblock channels to make good use of public supervision.

3.5. Strengthen teaching management

To improve the quality of distance education, on the one hand, we should improve the quality of online courses, on the other hand, we should strengthen teaching management. At present, there is no essential difference between the courses that can adopt distance education and offline courses, and some online courses have to undergo strict editing and review to achieve certain results, it should be said that the quality is guaranteed, therefore, to improve the quality of distance education, the key is to strengthen teaching management. The education department should take the lead in the management of distance education teaching, guide and supervise the implementation of the main responsibilities of relevant colleges and universities as a whole, and carry out joint governance with the departments of network information, telecommunications, public security, and market supervision. First of all, the National Open University and the pilot distance education colleges and universities should formulate the teaching management measures of the distance education courses themselves in combination with the local and local conditions, standardize the management systems of course selection, teaching, evaluation, supervision, and credit recognition, and incorporate the distance education courses into the daily teaching management. Secondly, for distance education courses, full-time curriculum responsible teachers should be equipped to be fully responsible for the teaching service and management of courses, cooperate with the teaching activities of online course lecturers and teaching teams, and strengthen learning organization and homework guidance. Thirdly, strengthen the monitoring of the learning process, the learning process should be managed by leaving traces and make full use of the new generation of information technologies such as artificial intelligence, big data, blockchain, and so on, to monitor identity authentication, course content, discussion records, and learning data according to laws and regulations, and effectively identify "brush class", "replace class" and other behaviors. Fourthly, strengthen the supervision and management of the course assessment, strengthen the examination supervision according to the actual situation of the course assessment, and effectively identify "brush examination", "substitute examination", and other behaviors in the examination by means of face recognition, double-machine, and other technical means. Fifthly, strengthen the integrity education of students, improve the identification and handling methods of students' violations, and strengthen the investigation and punishment. The sixth, strengthen the supervision and management of teachers, and punish the distance education curriculum teachers or curriculum responsible teachers who cause teaching accidents according to laws and regulations [10].

3.6. Draw on the advanced experience of quality management in foreign distance education

Distance education should attach importance to the quality and effectiveness of its teaching. China's distance education is still in the pilot and initial stages, lacking a corresponding quality standard system. But look at the world at large, the United States, as an internet and educational powerhouse, has richer practical experience in exploring online teaching projects, in 2019, the Virtual Learning Leadership Alliance of the United States and Quality Matters institutions jointly released the latest version of the "national standards for the quality of online education" for evaluating the quality of online education, this standard which is based on the latest research and best practices in the field of online education has been applied and has achieved initial results in multiple regions such as California, Florida, and Michigan [11]. China can learn from the quality standards of online education in the United States, align with international standards, and accelerate the establishment and implementation of quality standards for distance education based on its own national conditions.

Conclusion

From the perspective of economics, distance education has the benefits of realizing the sharing of education resources, meeting the needs of social development, promoting the cost reduction and efficiency increase of education, improving the development of educational technology, it deserves to be encouraged and vigorously accelerated for development, however, there are some problems existing in China's distance education, such as the relevant legal systems and policies need to be improved, the regional development is unbalanced, the specialty settings are not scientific, the enrollment market is chaos frequently, the teaching management is inadequate, therefore, it is necessary to promote the high-quality and rapid development of distance education of China by improving relevant legal systems and policies, increasing investment in weak

areas, optimizing the structure of specialties, rectifying the order of the enrollment market, strengthening teaching management, and drawing on the advanced experience of quality management in foreign distance education.

Конфликт интересов

Не указан.

Рецензия

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Conflict of Interest

None declared.

Review

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All articles are peer-reviewed. But the reviewer or the author of the article chose not to publish a review of this article in the public domain. The review can be provided to the competent authorities upon request.

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