

Practical Dilemmas and Paths of Open Education Governance from the Perspective of University Governance

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Abstract: The rapid development of information technology in the digital era has led the development and reform in the field of education. Both the transformation and high-quality development of open universities have put forward higher requirements for open education governance. Focusing on the important field of open education governance, this study, from the perspective of university governance, deeply explores the practical dilemmas faced by open education governance, such as unclear development positioning, difficulties in transformation and development, inadequate learning support services, insufficient depth of teaching reform, and weak professional development of teachers. In the lifelong learning education ecology of universal education, open education governance should focus on “useful and easy learning”, focus on industry-education integration, take serving society as its purpose, and promote the transformation and development of open education. Under the concept of collaboration and co-governance, a multi-subject collaborative governance mechanism should be built, and governance thinking should be actively implemented in open education and teaching affairs to accelerate the modernization of open education governance. This aims to realize the sustainable development of open education governance and provide strong theoretical support and practical guidance for building a more fair, high-quality, and flexible open education governance system.

Keywords: University governance; Open education; Education governance

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1. Introduction

“Promoting the modernization of the education governance system and governance capacity” is one of the ten strategic tasks proposed in China Education Modernization 2035, whose main goal is to “form a new pattern of education governance with the participation of the whole society”^[1]. China Education Modernization 2035 clearly proposes to promote the reform and innovation of educational organization forms and management models, and drive education modernization with educational informatization^[2]. In the digital era, the governance thinking under the concept of university governance is gradually applied to university education and

teaching affairs. Open universities need to grasp the era background of educational modernization and the specific requirements of university governance modernization, combine the practical problems of university development with their positioning and goals, and accelerate the promotion of governance modernization. This is not only an urgent task for open universities to deepen reform and transform development but also an inevitable requirement for open education to improve modern governance capacity and realize new-type governance.

In the development process of open education, it is necessary to give full play to the advantages of modern information technology, carry out academic and non-academic continuing education for social members, provide more “flexible, convenient, and open learning methods” and “multi-level and diversified educational services”, so as to realize “dislocated” development with ordinary universities, build a lifelong education system serving universal lifelong learning and a learning society, thus promoting educational equity and sustainable development, and undertaking the social responsibility and historical mission of open universities ^[3].

2. Open education governance

2.1. Open education

Open education is an important part of China’s higher education system. In a narrow sense, open education refers to adult academic and non-academic education activities organized by provincial, municipal, and county-level open universities led by the Open University of China, using modern information technology and open network resources. In a broad sense, open education generally refers to all educational activities aimed at promoting lifelong learning, including adult education forms organized by various continuing education institutions to serve national strategies, meet social needs, and satisfy personal interests ^[4].

Open education mentioned in this study specifically refers to open education in the narrow sense, which means that open universities provide learning opportunities and services to all people who are willing and able to receive higher education by using modern educational technology and high-quality online educational resources ^[5]. The open education concept, social service value, and social benefits upheld by open education have attracted increasing attention from the public and have become an important part of higher education.

2.2. Governance

Educational governance refers to a process of mediating conflicting parties and interest competitors in education through certain rules and procedures. It requires all participating parties to handle educational public affairs equally, cooperatively, and interactively, and finally realize educational co-governance ^[6]. Educational governance is the embodiment of modern governance thought in educational management, both emphasizing the characteristic of “co-governance” ^[7].

Open education governance in this study specifically refers to open education governance in the narrow sense, that is, under the joint participation of multiple subjects within open universities, they actively participate in various management affairs of open education, break the original inertia of educational management, transform the functions and roles of multiple participants from “management-oriented” to “service-oriented”, and finally form an ecological governance process of collaborative governance of open education ^[8].

3. Practical dilemmas of open education governance in the intelligent era

3.1. Unclear positioning in the transformation and development of open education

Since the Ministry of Education issued the Comprehensive Reform Plan for the Open University of China in

September 2020, 39 provincial radio and television universities have completed the renaming to open universities, hoping to take this opportunity to start the transformation and development of open education^[9]. Although open education has completed the renaming from radio and television universities to open universities, its internal management mechanism and school-running system still follow the previous status quo, which is contrary to the original intention of the renaming^[10].

In the renaming process of open universities, except for the Central Radio and Television University, only five provincial and municipal radio and television universities have carried out pilot projects to explore open universities. Other provincial, municipal, and even county-level radio and television universities only changed their names passively, without truly understanding the significance of the renaming of open universities, let alone making ideological preparations and response measures for transformation and development in the digital era. In particular, grass-roots municipal and county-level open universities still follow the previous school-running system, simply positioning themselves as teaching and enrollment points of open education, not to mention seeking school-running positioning and transformation and development opportunities in the development and changes of local cities.

3.2. Insufficient ideological preparation and response to internal changes and external competition

Although the Open University of China started the transformation and development of open education in 2020, clarifying that in the future, academic education and non-academic education will go hand in hand, social training and elderly education will complement each other, and strive to build a universal lifelong learning system, the national open education system is huge and complex, and the internal governance of open education still follows the management mechanism of the radio and television university era. The division of powers and responsibilities is unclear, including administrative, financial, and staffing affairs are managed by local education authorities, while specific business is managed by higher-level open universities. Multiple management does not lead to multiple support^[11]. Under the background of university enrollment expansion and the popularization of higher education, the demand for academic education in open universities has decreased year by year.

In addition, the vigorous development of online education in colleges and universities and off-campus online education institutions has brought great challenges to the enrollment of open education, resulting in a gradual reduction in the number of students and the scale of school-running in open education^[12]. Besides, the off-campus cooperative school-running mode of open education is chaotic, and the enrollment supervision of cooperative school-running institutions is not in place. Cross-regional enrollment has seriously damaged the regional enrollment ecological environment and affected the school-running credibility and social reputation of open education.

3.3. Incomplete learning support service system for open education

In the era of radio and television universities, open education started with satellite TV broadcasting teaching, and later the Open University of China cooperated with online colleges of many universities to offer online education, enriching the forms and ways of academic education and highlighting the educational concept of providing learning services for students in the early stage of open education^[13].

In the intelligent era, open education has failed to keep up with the pace of technological development, and has developed slowly in terms of educational technology hardware infrastructure, platform system construction, online teaching resource construction, and learning support and recommendation services. First, the hardware construction of open education is weak, and it has not realized that hardware infrastructure is the basic guarantee

for information-based teaching. Second, open education has a weak foundation in self-built platform software systems. The platform systems are outdated with simple functions, which do not provide sufficient support for teaching and management. Third, the number of online teaching resources in open education is small, and there are even fewer high-quality teaching resources really suitable for open teaching. The construction of online teaching resources is fragmented and not systematic. Fourth, open education has a low degree of autonomous learning and personalized learning, lacks awareness of learning support services, and cannot provide precise support services for the teaching and management of open education.

3.4. Need for strengthening the construction of open education faculty

As an important part of higher education, open education teachers should strictly demand themselves as college teachers. However, in open education teaching, because the teaching time of open education is set in the evening of working days and weekends to meet the time characteristics of adult learning, there are often low attendance rates, and even no students come to class ^[14]. In the long run, this will weaken teachers' enthusiasm for teaching, which is not conducive to the improvement of teachers' teaching level and professional development. Second, the structure of the faculty in grass-roots open universities is complex, with obvious advantages and disadvantages. Teachers have little willingness to actively learn new teaching concepts and information technology in the information age, and their role and positioning in teaching are unclear. Third, due to different modes of open universities in various regions, including the mode of coordinated development of open education and higher vocational education, the mode of two-way development of open education and secondary vocational education, and even the mode of coordinated development of open education and regional party schools, different school-running modes lead to unclear self-positioning of open education teachers, thus causing confusion in the professional development of open education teachers.

3.5. Insufficient efforts in deepening reform of open education

As an important part of higher education, open education actively responds to the era theme of “high-quality development”, which is also an inevitable measure for the transformation and development of open education. At present, there is still a big gap between the teaching practice of open education and the requirements for high-quality development of open education teaching. First, the teaching form of open education is still mainly offline centralized face-to-face teaching. Only some courses have online courses or live broadcast courses, and the actual participation in online courses is not high. Second, the supervision of open education teaching quality is relatively loose, with inconsistent standards and a long-term lack of effective supervision. Third, in the “Internet +” era, the teaching mode of open education lacks innovation, still focusing on teacher-centered offline teaching mode, with slow transformation to online teaching, not to mention online-offline integrated teaching mode. Fourth, from the perspective of the urgent requirements for skills in the new era and changes in industrial structure, the teaching content of open education is biased towards theoretical learning, with few practical professional skills, and even fewer cultivation of core literacy such as digital thinking, innovation and entrepreneurship ability, and industry-education integration.

4. Practical paths of open education governance in the intelligent era

4.1. Realizing digital transformation and development of open education from the perspective of lifelong education

Open education has developed from academic continuing education in the early TV university era to the current

social education including academic education, community education, and vocational training, and its ultimate development trend is to build a national lifelong education system^[15]. Therefore, open education should reform and develop under the guidance of the concept of lifelong education.

Open universities should actively adapt to the development trend of digital, intelligent, lifelong, and integrated education. It can be seen that open education should not only adapt to the development changes of the new era but also actively integrate into the process of digital transformation and development. From the initial correspondence education based on TV broadcasting to the current distance open education based on modern information technology, the innovation of information technology has become the driving force for the rapid development of open education. Especially in the era of accelerating development of digital technology, it is necessary not only to effectively make up for the shortcomings in “building an education system serving universal lifelong learning” but also to reduce the asymmetry, complexity, and uncertainty caused by internal changes and external shocks, and actively commit to creating a new pattern of education for lifelong learning and universal learning, driving the transformation and development of open education.

4.2. Focusing on industry–education integration and vocational orientation, and highlighting system characteristics

In the digital intelligence era, open education should further improve the school-running system and management system adapted to the new development stage, and establish and improve the school-running management mechanism. Under the background of high-quality development, the development direction of open education should transition from pursuing scale to pursuing quality, from academic compensation to knowledge compensation, and from diploma improvement to skill improvement, forming a new development concept of open education. In addition, as an important part of higher education, open education should have its unique educational characteristics and positioning, realize dislocated development and functional complementarity with full-time ordinary higher education and higher vocational education, take career development and vocational ability improvement as the orientation, serve local economic development, cultivate applied and vocational talents, meet the talent needs of local characteristic industries and key fields, and form a multi-level scientific talent training concept. Open education should always adhere to the scientific outlook on development and talent cultivation, take career development as the orientation, focus on the cultivation of professional and technical talents, serve regional economic development, strive to become the most popular local university in the region, and become a university at the door of ordinary people.

4.3. Focusing on “useful and easy learning” and emphasizing teaching quality

Teaching quality is also a core indicator to measure the school-running level of open education. Open education should change the previous educational and teaching methods, focus on the teaching content and methods of grass-roots open universities based on the current situation of open education, and guide students to carry out autonomous and personalized learning by using high-quality network resources and online learning platforms.

In terms of specialty setting and course offering, full consideration should be given to the talent training concept of open education and the law of adult learning. In terms of specialty setting, adhering to the basic principles of science, rationality, and standardization, a scientific and reasonable discipline and specialty system should be formulated, focusing on the offering of regional characteristic specialties and the development of key local construction specialties.

In terms of course offering, in addition to the regular offering of general courses, public courses, and

professional courses, ideological and political course construction should also be strengthened, and the effective integration of ideological and political courses and curriculum ideological and political education should be vigorously promoted. Course offering should focus on “useful and easy learning”, develop a series of characteristic courses really suitable for the characteristics of open education, and improve the effectiveness and universality of open education content.

4.4. Triggering teachers’ professional self-development through role transformation

In the teaching scenario of open education, the role of teachers has undergone a fundamental change. Teachers are no longer knowledge transmitters and learning organizers, but have evolved into learning guides, supporters, and promoters, aiming to provide students with more appropriate course resources and learning activities and help students master autonomous learning methods and skills. First, open education teachers should take the transformation of teaching roles as a trigger to reactivate their self-positioning and establish the concept of lifelong learning. Second, the transformation of the role of open education teachers provides more development opportunities and space for teachers. Teachers can give full play to their professional expertise and advantages and improve their teaching level and scientific research ability by participating in curriculum development, teaching resource construction, teaching reform research, and other activities. Third, the transformation of the role of open education teachers requires them to have the awareness and ability of self-development, constantly improve their self-management and self-development ability, so as to promote teachers’ professional self-development.

4.5. Leading the mainstream development of open education with social services

Open education has not been renamed for a long time, and the public has a limited understanding of open education, simply understanding it as a place to improve academic qualifications, renamed from radio and television universities. Open education should carefully examine the new attribute of “openness” in transformation, provide professional, practical, and retainable “local” talents and corresponding social training services for local social and economic development, actively connect its own development with regional development, take the initiative to serve, improve its social functions and influence, accurately position itself, and develop open education into a social university popular with the public. In the process of transformation and development of open education, the transformation of service awareness in open education should be led by learning support services, truly facing students, understanding their real needs, creating conditions and providing help for students’ online learning, adaptive learning, and personalized learning, meeting students’ needs of learning anytime and anywhere, further improving the quality of digital learning services, and establishing a perfect learning support service guarantee system.

5. Conclusion

Building a high-quality education system and promoting the high-quality development of higher education are the practical requirements for building an educational power. As an important part of China’s higher education system, open education should accurately judge its own development situation and the era background of high-quality development, actively explore the era connotation of the high-quality development of open universities, and promote the high-quality development of China’s open education. From the perspective of university governance, open education should change the traditional concept of educational management, manage open education affairs with the concept of educational governance, break the original inertia of educational and

teaching management through the joint participation of multiple subjects, transform the functions and roles of multiple participants from “management-oriented” to “service-oriented”, activate the internal motivation of multiple participants, build a multi-center and multi-subject collaborative governance model, and finally realize the high-quality development of open education.

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