

Research on the Current Situation and Strategy of “Internet Plus” Online Chinese Education

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Abstract: The era of Industry 4.0 brings about qualitative changes to the economy and society as well as poses new challenges to Chinese education, personnel training, and future development. It is the responsibility of Chinese educational institutions, researchers, government departments, and enterprises to adapt to the changes in science and technology, the market, and the society; to meet the needs of teachers, parents, and students; to understand the current situation of online Chinese education; to connect with the outside world; and ultimately to create a connection with a broader ecosystem of Chinese education to meet the learning needs of Chinese learners around the world.

Keywords: Internet Plus; Chinese education; Online education

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1. Introduction: In response to the development trend of global education in the era of science and technology

The world is now in the era of information technology. It has penetrated into all aspects of life, affecting all walks of life. In this context, wisdom education with characteristics of diversification, individualization, and intellectualization has become the main form of future education. The new industrial revolution has brought about qualitative changes in the economy and society and also posed new challenges to Chinese education, personnel training, and future development. Future education should cultivate students with biosphere consciousness, so that they have the consciousness of respecting and serving nature as well as the human society, closely integrating their own values with social values and human values, safeguarding the remaining biosphere and the human society, as well as meeting the future era of cooperation.

In this era of rapid development of science and technology, information technology is promoting educational reform and innovation, tending to be a lifelong education system. School is no longer a closed space, but an ecological learning environment connected with the society, science, and technology, closely integrating work and life as well as reflecting the organic integration of future education and information technology, which plays a role in promoting the international development and innovation of Chinese education ^[1].

2. Research status at home and abroad

2.1. Research status of online education at home and abroad

The Education Informatization 2.0 Action Plan issued in April 2018 clearly states that leading the modernization of education with the support of informatization is a strategy for China’s education reform

and development in the new era and is of great significance for building a strong country in education and human resources [2].

The Outline of the National Medium and Long-Term Education Reform and Development Plan (2010-2020) issued by the Chinese government put forward the concept of “paying attention to the different characteristics and personality differences of students, developing the advantages and potentials of each student,” encouraging individualized development, and providing “suitable education” for each student [3]. According to China Online Education Market Report [4], China’s online education market reached 346.8 billion yuan in 2019, with about 269 million users and a penetration rate of about 10%; more than 300 million college, middle school, and primary school students flooded the online education platform in 2020, and the platform’s daily activity rose from 87 million on weekdays to 127 million, an increase of 46% [4]. It can be seen that online education is becoming a new outlet in the education industry, and it is playing an increasingly important role in the education service system.

Pearson conducted a “Global Learner Survey” in 2019 [5]. The survey found that learners around the world still have great confidence in education, but the way they are receiving education is changing. They no longer rely entirely on conventional educational institutions, but rather on a “DIY” approach to their own education [5]. The survey identified several key trends.

(1) New learning models are reshaping education

According to the survey, people believe that learning will shift to a new focus emphasizing on self-service or “Do-It-Yourself,” especially when they need to update their knowledge system once they step into the workforce. As a result, more and more people will favor hybrid, modular, diversified, and personalized learning modes [5].

(2) Lifelong learning is becoming the norm

The survey shows that lifelong learning is no longer a concept. Learners need an education that adapts to the changing world in workplace, which means that they will continue to learn and piecemeal learning will become the norm as a result of transformative and career-driven learning [5].

In the face of great changes in global economy in the post-COVID era, the competition in the education industry and among educational institutions are also facing changes and restructuring, in order to meet the needs of teachers, parents, and students. How then to create an open and personalized online learning environment? The goal of educational institutions, researchers, government departments, and enterprises is to meet the learning needs of global learners. By listening to and heeding the voices of learners, it is possible to achieve progress together, realize the vision of global learners, and promote global economic growth.

2.2. Research status of online Chinese education at home and abroad

In an exclusive interview with Ren Qiliang, the fourth chairman of the Chinese Education Foundation of China, a reporter from China News Service reported that Chinese education is the most deeply rooted, widely covered, and effective form of teaching Chinese language and Chinese culture abroad. Up to now, there are about 20,000 Chinese schools, hundreds of thousands of Chinese teachers, and millions of Chinese students all over the world. As an important carrier to help overseas Chinese communities inherit Chinese culture, Chinese education has been referred to as the “Root Project.” Since 2020, many Chinese schools overseas have been affected by the pandemic. The chairman declared that he would further investigate the development trend of online teaching in the normalization of epidemic prevention and control in the post-COVID era, strengthen and expand the original online teaching projects, as well as take into consideration of the new situation and new needs in making use of new technologies, developing new projects, giving full play to the advantages of the platform, furthering pool forces, integrating resources, and focusing on online teaching. Chinese education is now conducted through the combination of online and offline teaching [6].

2.2.1. Online Chinese education in China

The Global Chinese Learning Platform, which was officially launched on October 25, 2019, uses advanced technologies such as artificial intelligence to gather all kinds of Chinese learning resources [7]. The platform is able to customize personalized learning programs for each learner, and it supports real-time feedback, covering 80% of daily life scenarios in dialogue learning through immersive human-computer interaction. It helps learners master authentic Chinese expression through role-playing; supports Chinese, English, Russian, Japanese, Korean, Thai, and other languages; gives better play to the advantages of online education; and helps Chinese educational institutions around the world to achieve the initiative of “suspending classes without stopping learning” during certain periods. The platform has accumulated 576,000 users from its launch to April 22, 2020, involving 123 countries around the world [7]. Compared with the data released by the Ministry of Education at a press conference recently, it is possible to appreciate the growth rate of users and countries covered by the platform.

On June 6, 2020, “Letter to Grandpa,” a real-life classroom of the Chinese Education Foundation of China began. Teachers and students from 66,329 login points across 26 countries followed the camera into the Summer Palace and Great Wall at Jiayuguan, in order to learn how to write letters under the influence of traditional Chinese culture [7]. According to the WeChat Public Account of the Chinese Language Education Foundation, its real-life classroom “Historic City-Kaifeng” began on August 1. Teachers and students from 58,210 login points across 24 countries followed the camera into Kaifeng, Henan Province, in order to learn about the historical legends and customs of the ancient capital of the Eight Dynasties as well as to appreciate the scenic spots that witnessed the change of Dynasties over thousands of years [7]. On the same day, more than 10,000 Chinese teachers and students from 168 Chinese schools and communities across 36 countries and regions, including Italy and New Zealand, gathered in the cloud to enjoy the beauty of Yangzhou and the unique charm of the well-known canal city [7].

During the pandemic, Saikuya’s “Animation Chinese Classroom” reached out to more than 300 Chinese schools and 50,000 students across 84 countries, with a total broadcast volume of more than one million views. Wenxin Intelligent Writing Assistant System, which uses artificial intelligence and natural language processing to achieve intelligent correction of compositions automatically, was introduced during the 3rd China Beijing International Language and Culture Expo.

These new learning methods, which integrate scientific skills and education in the internet environment, enable Chinese learners from all over the world to learn rich and colorful Chinese cultural knowledge remotely and in real time without space and time constraints.

2.2.2. Online Chinese education abroad

While online Chinese education is in full swing in China, Chinese communities around the world have also set off a new cycle of online Chinese education.

In Russia, Chinese education has also shifted to the “cloud.” Affected by the pandemic, Chinese departments abroad and cultural institutions at all levels in China have created various forms of online cultural activities, such as online “root-seeking” summer camps and Chinese cultural “cloud classes,” so that the younger generation abroad may “tour” China through the cloud and appreciate the unique charm of Chinese culture without stepping out from their homes.

Under the pandemic situation, in order to enable Chinese students to learn Chinese continuously, Hungarian Chinatown Chinese School has tried every means to find a “new” way – online and offline synchronous teaching. From traditional classroom to cloud classroom in addition to traditional teaching methods with online live classes, the teaching methods have become richer and more innovative, so as to meet the learning needs of different families under the pandemic.

Since March 10, 2020, a total of 35 courses have been offered by 42 teachers at the Oriental Language and Business Center in Yangon, Myanmar, in which all classes are being held online. The Oriental Language and Business Center uses different teaching methods based on the students' age group. The emphasis of these courses is on "spelling, reading, writing, and criticizing" as well as using different network platforms for teaching. The teachers also regularly exchange and learn from the online teaching methods, so as to truly achieve the goal of "suspending classes without stopping learning," "leaving school without leaving teaching," and "separated by screens, yet with love" in their attempt to help each student gain something from these online courses ^[8].

In order to observe the solar eclipse on June 21, an activity, "Date with the Solar Eclipse," was held in Sungai Danian Xinmin Duzhong, Malaysia. The solar eclipse was broadcasted live to the school's Facebook page and through a Zoom conference room with the teachers and students witnessing the celestial phenomenon.

In July 2020, the British Association for the Promotion of Chinese Education held the third online teaching training through Zoom. More than 350 Chinese teachers from 72 Chinese schools in Britain participated in the training, which provided assistance and support for online teaching in Chinese schools, as well as promoted cooperation and exchanges between Chinese schools through three online training sessions. The shift from offline to online teaching has been realized ^[9].

Xu Yueyi, a kindergarten teacher in the Sino-Italian School, started off "Teacher Xu Micro Classroom." Since her students are only 3–5 years old, they are too young for online classes. Hence, she holds micro classes, in which each class lasts about 5 minutes. With colorful picture books, she has created a series of popular courses for students, such as "COVID-19 Prevention Lessons for Children" and "World Earth Day." The Malaysian Ministry of Education encourages teachers to use the educational platforms set up by the Ministry and various teaching software and electronic media for online teaching ^[10]. The Kuala Lumpur Chinese Reading Activity and Quiz Competition, for example, was organized to identify an ideal online teaching mode for schools during the closure period.

Therefore, overseas Chinese education, also referred to as the "Root Project," is now moving towards a new era of wisdom education, providing a new way for overseas students to experience Chinese culture. Miss Zhang Chen, the founder of the education brand "Jinling Chinese" and the present CEO of Beijing Saikuya Technology Co., Ltd. said, "Chinese education, as an extension of the spread of Chinese language and cultural education to the world, accelerates the integration of communication and inheritance. It takes off with the rise of China's international status and the rapid development of emerging technologies – this is the goal that we need to devote our efforts to achieve together in the coming days."

3. Discussion on the strategy of "Internet Plus" online Chinese education

As China's status continues to rise, there are more opportunities for educational cooperation with governments and Chinese communities; hence, the prospects for Chinese education abroad will certainly improve. Beginning from the development mode and trend of future education, Hao Jianhui, the CEO of Hengji Group, expounded on the opportunities and challenges faced by modern education and introduced the concept of "Chinese Education Community," which aims at "ideological resonance, resource sharing, harmonious coexistence, and development." He mentioned that in the internet era, wisdom education is the product of economic globalization, technological change, and knowledge explosion; it is also the inevitable development of education informatization ^[11].

Therefore, the global online education practice of "suspending classes without stopping learning" is in fact a global movement for open education resources and a new attempt for subversive education, which is of revolutionary significance for promoting the innovation of Chinese education and teaching methods by means of information technology.

3.1. Multidimensional reconstruction of the new environment of Chinese education

3.1.1. Intelligent reconstruction of learning environment

Through the learning system supported by big data, mobile terminals for seamless access to learning services, and rich knowledge construction tools, an intelligent learning space with system interconnection and seamless information flow is constructed. In the process of reconstruction, a reasonable curriculum and technology construction plan should be formulated; short, medium, and long-term goals should be defined; and urgent needs should be solved. In constructing an integrated supportive teaching environment, it is necessary to analyze the needs of learners, course content, teachers, technology, teaching support, and organizational implementation, as well as consider the organic combination of network environment, teaching platform, network course, resource bank, application service, evaluation, certification, and quality assurance.

3.1.2. Reconstruction of educational content

Teachers and textbooks are no longer the only sources of educational content. Online courses will become the standard of schools, social learning guidance and services will be integrated into conventional teaching, and the learning experiences in the real environment outside the school will increase.

3.1.3. Reconstruction of teaching and learning methods

Expansible shared resources are added to the platform to enhance the interaction among teachers, learners, and learning resources^[12]. While enjoying personalized learning services supported by technology, learners will have access to social interaction, rich teaching strategies, real-time remote collaboration in their learning process, their own choice of time and space for learning, as well as the means to generate high-quality resources.

3.1.4. Reconstruction of management and evaluation

Learner-centered adaptive management and adaptive evaluation are important components. Educational analysis and decision-making based on big data allow the monitoring and warning of educational operation in real time, and they support the developmental evaluation of the learning process^[13]. It is imperative to further improve the quality standard system of Chinese education and formulate targeted curriculum standards, learning standards, textbook standards, and examination syllabus according to the characteristics of online language teaching and the actual situation of Chinese education in foreign countries.

3.1.5. Consider cost-effectiveness and profit-making

System maintenance, course production, and other costs must be considered in addition to raising funds through government and institutional funding, enterprise participation, cooperative co-construction, student tuition fees, and course sponsorships. For instance, education stakeholders should take an integrated approach, build adequate computer infrastructure, and provide appropriate trainings and workshops^[14].

3.2. Follow the theoretical basis of teaching and learning

Some academics contend that despite advances in science and technology, online education cannot completely replace in-person instruction and interpersonal interactions; the academic environment in university campus and the charm of teachers cannot be replaced by any advanced technology and network. Therefore, course-making and instructional design should be integrated with certain learning theories, such as conventional learning theories (including behaviorism, cognitivism, and constructivism) and connectivism. When developing Chinese online education resources, attention should be paid to several key ideas.

- (1) The educational concept should change from being “teacher-centered” in traditional classroom to “learner-centered” in online education and the “combination of leading and subject.” It is crucial to arrange Chinese teachers in a region in such a way so that they learn from each other ^[15], strengthen teachers’ online teaching skills training, focus on improving teachers’ information literacy, assist teachers in mastering the use of selected platforms, enhance teachers’ online teaching design ability, and introduce relevant incentive policies to nurture diversified, multi-functional teaching staff ^[16]. At the same time, various approaches can be used to improve the attractiveness of Chinese teachers in terms of their professionalism, such as giving awards, teaching subsidies, and teacher incentives ^[17].
- (2) The teaching method should change from “transmission and acceptance” to “blended teaching,” which combines in-person instruction with online learning and flipped classroom. In the post-COVID era, wisdom education should be integrated with Chinese education, internet technology and new media should be fully utilized, traditional teaching methods and modes should be reformed, and new methods should be explored. Tailoring appropriate learning modes for different groups of people ^[18] and paying attention to mental health issues among online learners are essential for promoting the civility and sustainability of higher education ^[19].

4. Conclusion

The internet can never replace schools. The teaching of formal education may be replaced by the internet, but the social growth of people can never be replaced by computers. Hence, schools will never die out. However, in the internet age, the basic functions, operation rules, operation modes, and school-running practices will undergo fundamental changes ^[20]. The internet will alter the DNA of schools. The cross-border integration of “Internet Plus” education is in fact the “genetically modified project” of education. However, in the face of the continuous emergence of new internet technologies, there is still a long way to go in creating an open, shared, and interactive Chinese education ecology.

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