

# *New Situation and Problems in the Reform and Development of Adult Education in Colleges and Universities from the Perspective of Learning Society*

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**Abstract**—At present, adult education in colleges and universities faces many problems, such as the lack of standardization and supervision of internal management. So, it's necessary to improve the quality of education and teaching, school-running conditions, and increase the full-time and stable teaching staff. Under such a new situation, this paper discusses that how to realize the importance of reformation and improvement of adult education quality. It is found that adult education in colleges and universities is closely integrated with politics, economy, and society. Therefore, it is the duty of adult educators to actively adapt to the changing situation and face problems.

**Keywords**—colleges, adult education, teaching quality, development

## I. INTRODUCTION

Adult education has continuously been developing for more than 20 years, since it regained popularity in the mid-1980s. Presently, a number of colleges and universities for adult education with distinct high-quality programs have been established and positive social effects have been achieved. With this development, a large number of vocational high school and senior high school students do not advance to traditional universities. Instead, they obtain college and undergraduate diplomas and skills certificates through adult education, which increases the number of years spent on labor force education.

Currently, there are two main types of schools undertaking the task of adult higher education in China: general colleges and universities and independent adult colleges and universities. In recent years, adult education programs at independent adult colleges and universities have been decreasing, while those at traditional colleges and universities have been increasing every year and are gradually recognized by society. Therefore, vigorously developing adult education in colleges and universities, especially improving the lifelong education system, is an important foundation and assurance for promoting the construction of a learning society. At the same time, the social practice of adult education has greatly promoted scientific research, which covers theories and

achievements of various types of adult education, of such programs and has thereby significantly enriched and developed the lifelong education system with Chinese characteristics. Moreover, research institutions of adult education and professional magazines on adult education have emerged. Therefore, it is worth to explore the role of adult education played in building a learning society, enriching people's professional and personal development, promoting holistic development, and achieving healthy and rapid development with the strategic goal of building a healthy and well-rounded society.

## II. NEW PROBLEMS IN THE REFORM AND DEVELOPMENT OF ADULT EDUCATION IN COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

Since the "Chinese economic reform, adult higher education in colleges and universities have made remarkable achievements. Adult higher education, with its characteristics of adulthood—whether professional or amateur—has been welcomed by majority of the adult students. Furthermore, it trains many exceptionally gifted individuals for the country. However, with the establishment of the socialist market economic system, the reform of the personnel and labor distribution system, and the popularization of higher education, adult education has been facing new problems, such as a lack of adult, night, and correspondence courses. As a result, the characteristics of adulthood, professionalism, and amateurism have been impacted for many years. Because of the rigid and conservative education system that follows ideas formed under the old economic system and in which the education investment system solely depends on government investment, especially since the expansion of enrollment at traditional colleges and universities, adult education in colleges and universities has once again collapsed into a state of dilemma. Adult education in colleges and universities is at a crossroads of underdevelopment, social dissatisfaction, and contradictions.

## III. DIFFICULTIES AND REASONS FOR ADULT EDUCATION

Given the dilemmas of adult education, it is important to understand the reasons behind people's perceptions as well as

schools' management systems and modes, which can be summed up as follows.

#### *A. Low Social Acceptance*

China's higher education system for academic qualifications is divided into two main types: general and adult higher education. The state considers that the two provide the same academic qualifications, and thus a diploma from either type of institution should grant graduates the same treatment in society and employment units. However, the standard of admission and quality of teaching are lower at adult education programs as compared with general higher education programs. It has been noted for a long time that society has a low recognition of adult higher education. In particular, after the expansion of enrollment at colleges and universities, the competition in the education market has become fierce. Adult education faces increasing pressure because its quality is difficult to guarantee, owing to an extremely low credit score line, low standards, and inadequate conditions for running schools.

#### *B. Poor Quality of Students*

Most students in adult education are those who have failed college entrance examinations, graduated from vocational and secondary schools without obtaining employment, participate in the workforce without a college diploma, and those who have either been laid off or are unemployed. They might enter the adult education program with a sense of disappointment and negative emotions. In their opinion, they need a diploma to find a job, and adult education is an alternative option or the last resort. They may ultimately want to pursue a college diploma or above. With fewer requirements for re-employment and job hunting, these factors increase the complexity of adult teaching components, and students' learning and training time becomes shorter in comparison to general education. Moreover, the quality of entering students needs to be strengthened and improved urgently.

#### *C. Inadequate Teaching System and Development Needs*

Adult higher education should embody the characteristics of adulthood, including amateurism and professionalism. To this end, its educational aims, curriculum, and teaching methods should be designed accordingly. However, the existing programs do not reflect the characteristics of adult higher education and cannot fully meet the requirements of its development<sup>[1]</sup>. By ignoring the function orientation, goal orientation, and reasonable division of labor of general higher education, these programs basically follow the mode of general education in the determination of personnel training programs, teaching organization, and student management. Adult higher education has evolved into another form of general higher education, one which cannot reflect the applicability and professionalism of adult education. We believe that adult higher education in colleges and universities should adhere to the principle of amateurism, use special teaching materials designed for adult learners, improve the effectiveness of teaching, strengthen practical teaching links, cultivate comprehensive ability, and innovate in the area of teaching methods.

#### *D. Need to Improve Instructor Quality*

The teaching staff of adult education in China has always been relatively weak. The long-term practice of relying on part-time instructors has seriously restricted the development of adult higher education. One of the factors restricting the development of adult education is that instructors at colleges and universities do not work sincerely. They are more concerned about earning an income, and as a result, tend to work extra jobs, such as this. Therefore, to form a virtuous cycle of running a school, high quality and stable teaching staff is needed.

#### *E. Institutional and Policy Obstacles in the Development of Adult Education*

Public welfare and industrial issues of education are an obstacle to the development of adult education. Educational authorities adhere to the principle of public welfare and fairness in education. However, in the field of adult education at colleges and universities, we should push adult education to the market, manage it independently, bear its own profits and losses, and even put forward the index of "profit." Therefore, in promoting the construction of a learning society, adult education has to bear a great economic burden and it is difficult to meet the public welfare requirements.

### IV. EXPLORING EFFECTIVE WAYS FOR REFORM AND DEVELOPMENT OF ADULT EDUCATION

A sound management is the basis of reform and development of adult education. First, the management of teachers should be people-oriented. Managers should improve their own professional quality and serve teachers enthusiastically. Second, to reform past practices where adult education in colleges and universities only focused on diploma education, existing programs should emphasize the development potential and overall quality improvement of students and also seek to cultivate a learning organization, learning team, learning family, and learning society. Specific measures are as follows.

#### *A. Change Ideas and Improve Management Systems*

Presently, the management of adult-school-running systems of colleges and universities mainly relies on a set of management systems of formal education. This kind of management does not consider the major differences in the concept of adult education, quality of students, teacher requirements, and so on. Therefore, it is conducive neither to the development of instructors for adult education at colleges and universities nor to the development of adult education. For example, the School of Adult Education of Shanghai University has put forward an important viewpoint: the development experience of adult higher education and traditional universities is changing from "convergence" to "seeking differences," that is, mainly in the direction of vocational education. This paper provides new consideration to the nature and orientation of adult higher education. It also notes that adult education in colleges and universities should run on systems closer to those of enterprises and markets. That is, adult education should be closely integrated with

employment opportunities, promotions, post transfers, and personal and professional quality improvement.

#### *B. Improve the Quality of Education and Teaching*

To strengthen the quality of adult education and teaching, first, process management should be conducted to ensure the full content of teaching and completion of teaching tasks, whether this involves face-to-face teaching, self-study, or online learning, including practical teaching. Furthermore, formulating quality standards for adult higher education is no longer the sole territory of universities. Market participation has brought the intervention of market voices, but this has not changed the essential opinion on education quality. The relationship between adult education and students at colleges and universities is no longer the identity relationship of vertical obedience, as it was before, but a kind of contract in which the legal relationship between participants is closer to equality. In the market economy, after-sales services are a necessary means to protect consumers' legitimate rights and interests. Graduate "recall" programs follow similar business practices. This kind of "after-sales service" highlights the status of students as consumers and forces higher education to be truly "student-centered." This represents a return to students' rights and is conducive to the protection of students' legitimate rights and interests. Such precedents are also found abroad, such as at the Department of Engineering at the University of South Florida in the United States, which provides a five-year certificate of eligibility for its graduates. If a graduate is required to apply certain skills in his or her work at any time in the five years following graduation but does not receive the necessary training during university studies, he or she can re-enter the program for free to acquire these skills. This kind of "recall system" can be instituted in today's adult colleges and universities in China.

#### *C. Strengthening the Construction of Teachers' Morality and Promoting Teachers' Educational Function*

Teachers' ethics, namely, their professional ethics, are closely related to the moral norms and norms of the educational profession. Teachers' professional ethics mainly include the following contents: the professional concept or practice of loving and serving students; the professional norms of loving one's job and devoting oneself to work; the professional qualities of rigorous and tireless learning and tireless teaching; the moral style of teaching by example, teaching and educating people, and having both morals and talent; and the pursuit of the realm of professional ethics of "integrity" cultivation. These elements show that strengthening the construction of teachers' professional ethics can cultivate teachers' concept of "student-oriented education," enhance teachers' sense of responsibility, and facilitate a spirit of love and dedication to their work to guide teachers in developing and promoting a positive and healthy direction for adult higher education. It is a manifestation of improving teacher quality, teaching effectiveness, and school management.

#### *D. Scientific Definition of Teacher Evaluation Criteria*

In August 2000, the Ministry of Education issued a report titled "Strengthening the Evaluation of Teaching Quality," which proposed to improve the evaluation systems of teaching quality, multi-dimensional evaluation of teaching norms, teaching operation, classroom teaching effect, teaching reform and research, teaching awards, and other teaching performances. Teachers should be guided to implement the government's educational policy, abide by teaching discipline, improve teaching methods, inspire students to reason, and guide cooperative and research-based learning. Schools should comprehensively conduct evaluations of teaching quality in the form of teacher self-evaluations, student evaluations, peer evaluations, and supervision evaluations<sup>[2]</sup>. According to the characteristics of adult education, educational professionals should establish evaluation criteria of teaching quality based on five dimensions: the emotional dimension, in which teachers should be loving to students as well as invested in and responsible for teaching; the content dimension, in which the teaching content should be professional and challenging; the methodological dimension, in which lessons should be carefully designed with a variety of teaching strategies; the effect dimension, in which teaching should be liked and respected by students, be effective, and significantly improve students' knowledge and abilities; and the reflection dimension, in which teaching should reflect research and experience<sup>[3]</sup>. With these five dimensions as the standard, teaching can be promoted to the level of practical research.

#### *E. Sharing the Educational Resources of Society and Colleges and Universities and Establishing Open Adult Education*

The sharing of educational resources between society and universities provides a better learning platform for adult students. Adult education programs should provide full play to school resources, educational services for the community, and obtain social support and recognition. Formally, it is necessary to establish and strengthen the long-term cooperation mechanism between schools and social enterprises, realize complementary advantages and resources, utilize the existing teaching points of social enterprises and adult schools to establish several educational bases, give full play to the benefits of resources, actively integrate into the economic and social development of the country, and serve adult students more conveniently and economically. Obviously, practical problems may arise during resource sharing. Therefore, managers need to conduct cross-system and cross-departmental coordination work to truly obtain resource sharing, as it would be highly beneficial for the students<sup>[4]</sup>.

#### *F. Constructing the Service Concept of Lifelong Education*

To develop adult education, we should also establish the concept of lifelong education. On the one hand, the establishment of the idea of lifelong education will certainly provide a vast space for the development of adult higher education. In the knowledge age, new knowledge, technology, theory, methods, and information emerge constantly. No matter how high of a degree a person holds, his or her education may not be sufficient to fully meet the needs of the workforce as society develops in the years to come. On the

other hand, a learning society can be formed. This will surely serve as a strong driving force for the development of adult higher education. The continuous development of society and the progress of science and technology mean that everyone will need to learn and improve throughout their lives, including during their professional careers. Therefore, the development of active learning, knowledge supplementation, and self-awareness promotion is the beginning of establishing and improving the lifelong education system and building a learning society. College education will also face the market, follow the market mechanism, and reform the management mode of teachers and students, so that the management of teachers and students will be based more on the value of the law of education, which is a key to improve and guarantee the quality of education and teaching<sup>[5]</sup>.

#### V. CONCLUSION

The 21st century is the era of the knowledge economy. The reform and development of adult education must change the concept of running a school, renew the concept of education, strengthen the system reform, further open the school-running system, establish a competitive and dynamic multi-investment and multi-school-running pattern, and improve the quality of

education and teaching. We believe that under the correct guidance of the national policy and attention of the leaders of various schools, as well as through persistent, enterprising, and unremitting efforts of adult educators, adult education in colleges and universities will continue to improve and expand, playing an integral role in creating a lifelong education system and learning-oriented society.

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