

A Path for Private Colleges and Universities to Improve Teaching Quality Against the Background of Open Online Course Construction*

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Abstract—This paper respectively analyzes the advantages of open online courses and the shortcomings of private colleges and universities, discusses the pertinence of the former to the latter in improving the quality of education, and highly discusses the work to be conducted and the problems to be noted for private colleges and universities in applying open online courses. It is thought that appropriate application of open online courses in private colleges and universities will be helpful to improve the quality of education.

Keywords—open online courses; private colleges and universities; quality of education

I. INTRODUCTION

The idea of Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) was put forward by two scholars Bryan Alexander and Dave Cormier in 2008 and was first put into practice in Connectivism and Connective Knowledge course by George Siemens and Stephen Downes in the year. Since then, Stanford University, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Princeton University and other international famous universities have carried out MOOC education successively. In 2012, three MOOC platforms such as Udacity, Coursera and edX were established in succession. After that, MOOCs emerged around the world. A wave of open courses construction oriented to reducing education costs, promoting education equity, improving education quality and serving lifelong learning was raised in higher education field. [1]

Open online course include but not limited to MOOC. It is a general term of other similar types of courses developed on the basis of MOOC and represented by MOOC, and includes the MOOC-based SPOC, and MOOC and SPOC based open online courses and so on. In 2013, under the strong promotion of the Ministry of Education, China began

to construct open online courses; in 2018, the first batch of 490 national open online courses was approved and launched by the Ministry of Education; in 2019, the Ministry of Education approved and launched the second batch of 801 national boutique open online courses. At present in China, there have already been 12,500 MOOC courses; more than 200 million person-times of college students and social learners participate in the study online; and up to 65 million person-time of college students obtained MOOC credits. [2] In addition, the intra-school and inter-school curriculum sharing and application models have been continuously innovated; there have already been the "Curriculum Sharing Alliance of Universities in the Western and Eastern of China", "UOOC Alliance of Local Universities", "Computer Education MOOC Alliance of Universities in China", and so on; moreover, the "i-course" Network and "XuetangX" and other course platforms also provide a small scale of customized online courses in order to meet the teaching demands of different types and different levels of colleges and universities. After six years of development, the construction and application of open online courses in China has made great progress. In 2019, China MOOC Conference was held and published the "China MOOC Action Declaration", and even proposed the development prospects of "implementing the new concept of education, further integrating technologies such as AI and VR, making innovation on the MOOC learning content, mode and methods, and opening up new realm for future development of MOOC". [3]

II. THREE ADVANTAGES OF OPEN ONLINE COURSES

A. Flexible Organization

Compared with the teaching in traditional classroom, open online course has more relaxed requirements for time, space and the number of people, so that the teaching organization is more free and flexible. Open online course better reflects the student-centered teaching concept as it makes students available to learn over and over again at anywhere and anytime. As for pure open online courses, teacher may answer students' questions by means of online teaching interaction, make evaluation on students by online

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test, and share resources by transmitting teaching documents. Teachers can also teach in online and offline mixed mode by virtue of open online courses according to the actual conditions, such as arrange pre-study content online before class, carry out flipped classroom teaching, assign homework online after class, and answer questions and make discussions. Due to the relatively wide restrictions on the number of students, open online courses can be in large and small scales and even can be taught in cross-school mode, which greatly breaks the shackles of traditional teaching space.

B. Rich Resources

In just a few years, open online course in China has emerged and its course supply capability is being constantly improved. According to the "China Open Online Course Development Report (2013-2016)", universities in China had about 1400 open online courses; wherein, general education courses account for about 26.43%, public basic courses account for 17.03%, professional basic courses account for 26.94%, and professional courses account for 29.01%. According to the classification of courses on the "i-course" Network, the fields of disciplines involved in the open online courses just on this website include computer, economic management, psychology, foreign language, literary history, art design, engineering, science, medicine and health, agriculture, forestry and gardening, philosophy, law, and so on; in addition, the courses also involve ideological and political theory course, advanced placement, vocational education, and innovation and entrepreneurship and other categories of courses.

C. High Quality

"The Ministry of Education's Opinions on Strengthening the Construction, Application and Management of Open Online Courses in Colleges and Universities" (JG [2015] No. 3) proposes to "build up a batch of high-quality open online courses represented by large-scale open online courses, and integrated curriculum application with teaching services; support colleges and universities having advantages in certain disciplines and modern educational technology to focus on the cultural quality education courses for college students and the public and professional core courses with extensive range of audiences, and construct open online courses with high-quality content and good teaching effect and suitable for online communication and teaching activities". This opinion makes clear the quality requirements for open online courses from macro level. Specific to the school level, for example in the "Xiamen University's Open Online Course Construction Management Measures (Trial)", it is required that: "course leader should be teacher officially employed by the school and have rich teaching experience and high academic achievements. Course leader and lecturer should have good professional ethics and strong teaching capability. Course team should actively participate in the teaching reform in the in-depth integration of IT and education. The team should maintain in reasonable structure and stable staffing. In addition to course leader and lecturer, it is also needed to provide necessary assistant teachers to ensure the normal and orderly operation of online and offline

teaching". It can be said that the quality of open online courses has been highly valued from top to bottom in China and the quality of the course construction is ensured from many perspectives such as famous teachers, excellent content, technology integration and service follow-up.

III. THREE SHORTCOMINGS AFFECTING THE TEACHING QUALITY OF PRIVATE COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

A. Less Famous Teachers

"The so-called university lies in the quality of teachers." It can be said that the teaching quality of a university considerably depends on the quality of teachers and the number of famous teachers. Although private colleges and universities in China have achieved significant improvements both in scale and quality over more than a decade years development, their social status and influence are still indisputably difficult to compete with most public institutions. [4] In addition to the influence of traditional ideas, this situation is mainly reflected in the lack of platforms both in quantity and level, and the lack of government investment. Those shortcomings are enough to lead to the overall low level and large mobility of teachers and even rare famous teachers in private colleges and universities.

B. Less Courses

As aforesaid, in most private colleges and universities, there are not only few famous teachers, but also always insufficient teachers. The ratio of students to teachers by quantity is at a critical point; in partial majors, the ratio is even far beyond the reasonable value. Teachers have heavy basic teaching tasks; meanwhile, the school is basically aimed at meeting the demand for opening necessary courses. In this circumstance, it is hard to concern whether the selective courses are rich or not and even meet the demand of students having different learning interests. In order to take favorite courses, students often scramble for courses so that courses especially excellent courses are often in short supply in teaching of private colleges and universities. Moreover, due to the shortage of teachers, professional courses in private colleges and universities are also difficult to be provided in mode of "multiple teachers for one course". In the long run, this situation is neither conducive to curriculum construction in the long run nor even separating teaching and testing. Some schools even often set up courses based on the conditions of students. In this case, it is even more difficult to guarantee the teaching quality.

C. Less Resources

The said less resource not only refers to the less fund sources and the lack of fixed funding from the government, but also refers to the restricted on-campus teaching resources. As most private schools are funded by private capitals, they take operation cost into more specific consideration and have more intensive awareness of operation risk; reflected in the investment of fixed assets, they are quite cautious. [5] Consequently, most schools have long been lack of teaching space or cannot reach the standard; most obviously, the

classroom scheduling rate is extremely high, and there is almost no flexible space and time. In this situation, it is almost impossible to increase the number of parallel classes or to open more elective courses, let alone the development of small-class teaching.

IV. OPEN ONLINE COURSES PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE QUALITY IMPROVEMENT OF PRIVATE COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

In view of the above three shortcomings of private colleges and universities, open online courses can precisely solve the relevant contradictions by virtue of its unique advantages. Featured by flexible organization and less time and space constraints, open online courses can undoubtedly help schools with tight classroom resources to save more teaching space; and featured by rich resources, this mode can be directly used in private colleges and universities by means of purchasing or joining a curriculum alliance to facilitate increasing the quantity of courses in the school and enriching the types of courses and enlarging the bank of course resources; moreover, featured by high quality, this mode makes students in private colleges and universities available to enjoy the style of masters of famous schools without going out of school, and even makes teachers able to get inspired and learned from it; especially provided that the course selective teacher and supply teacher need to jointly prepare and give lectures for a course under the framework of certain curriculum alliances, this mode can become an important medium for the teaching exchange and ability improvement of teachers in private colleges and universities. Hence, this mode is of more profound meaning for improving teaching quality.

More realistically, this mode can effectively reduce the cost of education, which means that the investors of private universities can achieve the improvement in teaching quality just by investing less fund to some extent. This way not only relieves the risks of wasting human resources and fixed asset investment due to possible fluctuation of student resources but also is conducive to improving the indexes relevant to talent cultivation quality.

From the government level, private colleges and universities are also positioned as the main bodies using open online courses. Obviously, only after being extensively used can high-quality teaching resources really play their role, while private colleges and universities are naturally lacking advantages in "building courses" and are thirst to seek "usable courses".

V. DISCUSSION ON THE IMPLEMENTATION PATH

A. Basic Parts

1) *Determining the demand*: When deciding to introduce open online courses in, school should firstly take the following questions into consideration: which kind of course is urgently to be improved? What is the primary demand? For example, whether is it needed to introduce general elective course or professional basic course in? Whether is it

to solve the restriction in course resources or to promote teacher teaching? Different demand may lead to different actions, while different action may produce different outcome, and this outcome should be consistent with the school's intended purpose.

2) *Selecting the object*: After making clear the demands, school can choose the mode of course according to specific demand. For example, if it is expected to enrich the resources of general education curriculum, it is possible to choose several course platforms well-known in China; if it is hoped to have more in-depth teaching exchanges with the course construction party, it is available to join some local or professional curriculum alliances; especially by introducing SPOC in, it is available to better achieve the sharing and co-construction of curriculum, and even reconstruct it based on the self-demand.

3) *Realizing the connection*: Credit recognition is a key part of the introduction of off-campus open online courses. School needs to formulate corresponding credit recognition management methods while introducing courses in, so that students' open online course credit can be recognized as the course credit in the school after students complete the course and obtain scores.

4) *Providing guarantee*: In aspect of teaching professional courses, for teachers who share and co-construct courses across schools or use off-campus open online courses to carry out flipped classroom teaching, school should actively support them and appropriately give them rewards for the purpose of helping to improve the teaching quality in classroom, such as increasing the teaching workload coefficient, or give policy priority in aspect of applying teaching program or excellent teacher and award evaluation. For open online courses of general education, school should invite assistant teachers responsible for daily management, answering questions, and assisting students in learning.

B. Several Nonnegligible Aspects

1) *Pilot first*: Open online course is a new thing for most private colleges and universities. In the sharing process, it is necessary to move steadily rather than expecting to realize it overnight. It is necessary and a must to make a small-scale pilot first. In the pilot process, it is needed to focus on collecting and timely solving issues, and sum up with countermeasures for the same type of problems, to ensure smooth opening of the pilot course, and gradually expanding it on this basis.

2) *Compliance with the actual situation of students*: While introducing a course in, school should pay attention to analyzing the actual situation of students; the teaching effect will surely be counterproductive if school blindly pursue the famous teachers and neglect the actual acceptability of students in the school. China's college entrance examination admission policy determines the average level of students sources in private colleges and universities. Therefore, when

choosing open online courses as professional courses in teaching, it is also necessary to try to select course from the same level of school opening the course based on the principle of teaching students according to their aptitude, or appropriately reform the existing course according to the existing students' level so as to make the course's difficulty close to student's ability and better realize the sharing of high-quality off-campus teaching resources. [6]

3) *Strengthening supervision*: If the advantage in flexible organization of open online courses is improperly taken, the characteristic of its looseness will appear. If the students in private colleges and universities have poor self-discipline ability and weak self-learning ability, even high-quality may become "non-sense course". Therefore, enhancing the daily management of courses becomes particularly important. For general education courses, school should provide a special officer to supervise each group of courses, conduct spot checks on the learning situation, and answer questions about relevant issues. For courses implementing online examinations, appropriate measures should be taken to eliminate cheating from the perspective of technical prevention and scientific invigilation to ensure the validity of the examination.

4) *Excess is just as bad as deficiency*: Pure open online course mainly relies on the distant teaching of the course construction teacher. Compared with the traditional form of face-to-face knowledge teaching in classroom, the limitation of online course cannot be ignored. Therefore, open online course can neither be regarded as a master key, nor be unrealistically spread out in all-round way. Interactive teaching in real classroom is indispensable. It is hard to imagine a state in which a school provides students with education fully by virtue of open online courses. It is impossible to realize a more intuitive communication between teachers and students, and even play the role of "demonstration both in learning and behavior" of teacher.

VI. CONCLUSION

Featured by flexible organization and rich resources (especially the high quality of boutique open online courses as currently recognized in China), open online course can precisely compensate the intrinsic shortcomings of private colleges and universities such as lacking famous teachers, lacking courses and teaching resources. However in the process of specific application of open online courses, private colleges and universities should follow the principle of demand orientation and guarantee follow-up, and meet some basic requirements such as pilot leading, seeking truth from facts, and ensuring quality. Only if being appropriately applied can open online course provide a feasible and effective path for improving the teaching quality in private colleges and universities in China.

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