

The Impact of Building a National Online Education System on Lifelong Learning Based on the Policy of Lifelong Learning for All

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ABSTRACT

By analysing the development process of lifelong learning policies in China, this study identifies three stages in the evolution of the policy in China. The study concludes that the establishment of the online educational system is critical to following the lifelong learning policy. To illustrate, it can be summarized as follows: the online education system plays a favourable role in guaranteeing citizens' right to lifelong learning, building a learning society, and integrating into the new era of a knowledge-based economy.

Keywords: Lifelong learning, Online education, Policy evolution, Learning society.

1. INTRODUCTION

Since the term "lifelong learning" was officially introduced by UNESCO in 1965, it has become generally recognized as an essential educational concept worldwide. Numerous countries have formulated their educational policies to promote lifelong learning or have built their educational systems based on lifelong learning. In the 21st century, lifelong learning is still so popular that it is universally appreciated and actively implemented by diverse countries, regions, and international organizations.

In 2019, China intended to construct a contemporary education system that fulfils people's lifelong learning requirements by 2035.

At the same time, China will be promoted as a large learning country with sufficient human resources and strong talents. In order to create a learning society with more flexible modes, more abundant educational resources, and more convenient learning atmospheres, the Fifth Plenary Session of the 19th CPC Central Committee emphasized: "giving full play to the advantages of online education and improving the lifelong learning system". Based on this, this study will first analyse the development process of lifelong learning policies in China, thereby clarifying the intentions and implications behind the policies that have been implemented. Secondly, this study will investigate the advantages of online education so that more citizens will

be willing to become lifelong online learners, which will exert a positive influence on the development of a learning society in China.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Definition of Lifelong Learning

Lifelong learning emerged in the 1970s, progressed in the 1990s, and has continued to thrive in the twenty-first century, with UNESCO emphasizing that lifelong learning is the key to unlocking the door of light in this era [1]. This is mainly because lifelong learning has become an indispensable part in the situation of the knowledge economy in the 21st century, which is full of unknowns and challenges [2]. However, there is no unified official definition of lifelong learning in the global context.

The following are some of the most prevalent academic perspectives on lifelong learning. Firstly, lifelong learning refers to people's learning in different environments, such as schools, families, workplaces, and public places; secondly, learners of all ages or running through different stages of human development can be all enrolled in the lifelong learning processes, starting from the birth until death [3]. To be more specific, lifelong learning is a process of knowledge renewal and knowledge innovation, with the dominant idea being that learners are required to purposefully deepen their initially

acquired knowledge through formal, non-formal, and informal learning throughout their lives, so that they can adapt to a rapidly changing society.

2.2. The Evolution of Lifelong Learning Policy in China

Since the introduction of lifelong learning, it has attracted much attention and has gradually developed from an advanced trend to an educational policy in China, eventually reaching the level of legislation. Accordingly, the development process of the lifelong learning policy in China can be divided into the following three stages.

2.2.1. The Introduction Phase (1980-1997)

With the initial implementation of the "reform and opening up" policy in the 1980s, the notion of lifelong learning, which is considered a popular trend in the international arena, was also introduced to China and sparked heated discussions in the academic circles at that time. Since then, lifelong learning has gained a place in China's education sector.

As a result of the heated debates, the country also realized the necessity of lifelong learning. In this case, "lifelong learning" was first mentioned in 1997 in the "Opinions on the current active promotion of quality education in primary and secondary schools" issued by the State Education Commission [4]. This document emphasized the importance of students' ability to continue learning as a lifelong process and the necessity for educational institutions to promote the cultivation of this capacity.

To conclude, this is the period when the concept of lifelong learning was first introduced into China and demonstrated its presence in the relevant educational policy documents. However, lifelong learning in this period did not appear as a stand-alone education policy but rather as part of related policies, and its connotation was unclear and limited. In this period, the lifelong learning policy was still in the embryonic stage.

2.2.2. The Development Phase (1998-2011)

In 1998, the Chinese Ministry of Education issued the Action Plan for Revitalizing Education for the 21st Century. In this plan, lifelong learning is no longer mentioned as a separate concept, instead, as a systematic system, implying that the original connotation of lifelong learning is being enriched and enhanced [5].

In 2002, the notion of "forming a learning society with lifelong learning for all people" was explicitly and formally proposed at the 16th Party Congress. After that, the number of policy documents on lifelong learning progressively increased; for example, in 2003, the Decision on Further Strengthening the Work of Talents emphasized that communities and institutions should

encourage and guarantee lifelong learning through multiple channels [6], and in 2004, the Proposal on the Implementation of the National Activity of "Creating Learning Organizations and Striving to Be Knowledgeable Workers" advocated that workers should develop the concept of lifelong learning. Moreover, the Ministry of Education recommended in 2009 to develop the lifelong learning law and promote the establishment of a flexible and open platform for lifelong learning.

At this stage, the lifelong learning policy encourages all citizens to become lifelong learners. In addition, the government also pays attention to the creation of a lifelong learning platform which provides abundant open educational resources (OER) to the public. Therefore, in this period, the lifelong learning policy has a strong global and developmental character, representing a distinct enrichment and expansion.

2.2.3. Concrete Deepening and Promoting Phase (2012-present)

The 18th Party Congress was held in 2012 with the theme of "improving the lifelong learning system and building a learning society". Since then, the direction of implementing a lifelong learning policy has been increasingly complex.

The 12th Five-Year Plan for National Education Development (hereinafter referred to as "the Plan") was released in 2012, emphasizing that the reforms in education at all levels and in all types of schools should be in accordance with the framework of lifelong learning. At the same time, the Plan also recommended that the official laws and regulations be drafted to provide legal guarantees for lifetime learning for all people [7]. During the period between 2012 and 2014, Taiyuan City, Ningbo City, Hebei Province, and Fujian Province promulgated regulations on the promotion of the smooth implementation of lifelong learning practices for all. In addition, the Plan also specifies the paths and steps for enhancing lifelong learning. For example, "establishing a system of certification of continuing learning results, credit accumulation and conversion" and building "overpasses" for multi-channel learning [8].

On the other hand, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC) and the State Council issued China Education Modernization 2035 (hereinafter referred to as "2035"), which makes strategic planning and overall design for accelerating educational modernization and building an educational power with a higher historical position, broader international vision and deeper strategic vision in 2009. One of the primary development goals for the 2035 is to "build a modern education system that serves lifelong learning for all people." This suggests that the lifelong learning policy continues to improve in terms of quality, efficiency, equity, and sustainability.

3. THE IMPACT OF ONLINE EDUCATION SYSTEMS ON LIFELONG LEARNING

From a global perspective, a new round of scientific and technological revolution and industrial revolution is so ubiquitous that the significant scientific and technological advances drive new transformations in social production. To illustrate, the Internet, artificial intelligence, and other new technologies are continually redefining education, tremendously modifying the way knowledge is acquired and imparted. As an essential supplement to the traditional education system, the online system can address the expanding educational demands of individuals in the Internet era [9]. The Fifth Plenary Session of the 19th CPC Central Committee clearly pointed out "giving full play to the advantages of online education, improving the lifelong learning system, and building a learning society". Therefore, it is of vital significance to clarify the advantages of the online education system, so that more individuals can be benefited from becoming lifelong learners through the online education system.

3.1. Online education system helps guarantee citizens' right to lifelong learning

The essence of lifelong learning for all is all-name learning, emphasizing that every citizen has the right to learn [10]. However, the implementation of this right is confronted with various challenges such as economic conditions, geographical location, resource allocation, and infrastructure. The online education system enables citizens to break through these constraints to the maximum extent by, allowing them to access OER and practice their right to continue learning at home. From the economic dimension, the national online education system is established under the direction of diverse governmental agencies, which provide educational resources and services in an inexpensive or even free manner. From a resource perspective, the national online education system is a collaborative effort among multiple departments and institutions, which provides people with rich digital learning resources to meet the differentiated requirements of various learners. On a technical level, the national online education system is supported by information technology, which can fully take into account the learning styles and habits of different groups of people, as well as address the learning difficulties of special groups of disadvantaged people, so that every citizen enjoy the same opportunity to learn.

3.2. Online education system helps build a learning society

Learning has become an urgent need for individuals, organizations, and communities, especially in the information society where there is rapid development of science and technology, continuous iteration of

information and knowledge, the shortening cycle of knowledge updating, the accelerated frequency of innovation, and the increased requirements for human quality. To put lifelong learning into practice, it is necessary to not only reform the institutional mechanisms and innovative methods but also establish the national online education system, which provide intellectual support and technical support [11]. First, the national online education system can stimulate learners' awareness of and enthusiasm for learning. The proposed flexible online system, enables people to understand the concept of "lifelong learning and lifelong benefits" through the medium of the Internet [12]. Moreover, the abundant online learning resources and learning content can also fulfil people's diversified learning needs and mobilize their learning enthusiasm. Second, the national online education system supports learners to learn as it can give full play to the advantages of online education by encouraging learners to learn without geographical and temporary restrictions. Finally, the national online education system improves students' ability to adapt to the learning society. With the information technology tools such as computers, multimedia, and modern communications, learners can be encouraged to pay more attention to the role of information technology in learning, thereby developing their information literacy and certain necessary learning skills.

3.3. Online education system helps cross over to the new era of knowledge economy

In the 21st century, knowledge is regarded as an essential factor of productivity and key capital in the prevailing knowledge economy. Lifelong learning, which is considered a solid foundation in this era, can merely exert its profound influence through continuous reform and innovation. In this case, the national online education system can effectively solve the aforementioned challenge in the knowledge economy [13]. First, the national online education system has changed the traditional education and teaching mode by relying on the advantages of information technology. It transformed from, traditional face-to-face teaching into a hybrid teaching that combines online and traditional teaching modes. Simultaneously, because of its openness and comprehensiveness, it has naturally shared the educational resources and integrated the educational modes of higher education, continuing education, academic education, and non-academic education. Second, the online education system has enhanced the systematic platform for lifelong learning. In the process of promoting education informatization, the national online education system is still directed toward the people-oriented goal, which provides convenient learning services for numerous learners through the online educational platforms. However, its connotation embedded behind the service has gradually deepened

from the initial single network education to the social learning activities of multiple types and levels, which is committed to building a public education platform to meet the diversified lifelong learning needs of all members of the society. Finally, the national online education system is conducive to cultivating various types of knowledge-based talents who can adapt to the development of the knowledge economy.

4. CONCLUSION

Since the introduction of the concept of lifelong learning in China, China has explored a set of lifelong learning systems suitable for our national conditions with the development of scientific research and the accumulation of practical experience. However, when the lifelong learning policy is implemented, it still faces some obstacles.

In this situation, the national online education system can overcome these barriers and achieve the fairness in education to a certain extent. Combined with the feature of information technology + education, the national online education system can implement an "autonomous" teaching mode, which will profoundly help China build a learning society and realize education modernization.

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