



# Study on the Transformation of Chinese Higher Academic Continuing Education in the Context of the Epidemic

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**Abstract.** The epidemic has accelerated the transformation of teaching mode of Chinese higher academic continuing education, i.e., from offline to online teaching. In view of its difficulties during epidemic, such as, backward construction of online teaching platform, limited online course resources and immature teaching staff, higher academic continuing education should optimize the student-oriented online teaching platform, update online course resources, and enhance teacher training. In this way, it can promote the transformation and development of higher academic continuing education and provide strong support for the construction of lifelong education service system.

**Keywords:** Epidemic · Chinese higher academic continuing education · Online teaching

## 1 Introduction

Continuing education is an educational project that emerged from the United States in the 1930s, and with the advent of the knowledge economy era and the widespread dissemination of the concept of lifelong learning education, continuing education projects have become popular worldwide. Many countries use government administrative means to promote this project [1]. For example, the Japanese government proposed that the continuing education project is an important part of the talent strategy; Germany enacted a law specifically applicable to German continuing education, which specifies the concept, applicable objects, and implementation requirements of continuing education [1]. In China, continuing education is one of the important plans for medium- and long-term education reform and development, referring to educational activities for all members of society, especially adults, after their school education. It is an important part of the lifelong learning system that includes two types of education: higher academic continuing education and higher non-academic continuing education. Among them, higher academic continuing education mainly refers to a kind of high-level additional education activities with the goal of obtaining the corresponding level of academic certificates [2]. Higher non-academic continuing education refers to education other than higher academic continuing education, these include job training and various tutorials, refresher courses and vocational training courses [3].

Higher academic continuing education is a special type of higher education in China, and after decades of development process, it has formed a unique and large -scale mode of schooling. According to the “National Education Development Statistical Bulletin” and related statistics published by the Ministry of Education of China, the number of graduates of higher academic continuing education in China has been increasing year by year since the reform and opening up policy in 1978 [4–6]. In the past ten years, the growth rate has accelerated significantly, from 2,084,300 in 2010 to 3,637,600 in 2020 [5, 6]. This shows that higher academic continuing education will directly affect the quality of talent cultivation in China. Higher academic continuing education is a special type of higher education in China, and after decades of development process, it has formed a unique and large -scale mode of schooling. According to the “National Education Development Statistical Bulletin” and related statistics published by the Ministry of Education of China, the number of graduates of higher academic continuing education in China has been increasing year by year since the reform and opening up policy in 1978 [4–6]. In the past ten years, the growth rate has accelerated significantly, from 2,084,300 in 2010 to 3,637,600 in 2020 [5, 6]. This shows that higher academic continuing education will directly affect the quality of talent cultivation in China.

In December 2019, a sudden new coronavirus brought far-reaching effects and great changes to various industries around the world. Currently, the epidemic pattern in China has entered a normalized phase of epidemic prevention and control with sporadic distribution. This is both a challenge and an opportunity for higher academic continuing education, which focuses on cultivating high qualified and skilled talents to meet the development of the times. How to transform and develop Chinese higher academic continuing education in the context of epidemic? This is the core issue to be discussed in this paper.

## **2 Transformation of the Delivery Model of Higher Academic Continuing Education**

After this public health emergency, continuing education for higher education has adjusted its teaching mode from offline teaching to online teaching in time. The online teaching has showed its advantages in response to the health emergency, and strongly promoted the innovation and transformation of the teaching mode of higher academic continuing education.

### **2.1 Layout of Online Teaching Mode for Higher Academic Continuing Education**

Since the rise of the Internet trend, China has been attaching great importance to promoting the development of online education. In 1998, the “Action Plan for Revitalizing Education in the 21st Century” proposed the planning and construction of the “Modern Distance Education Project”, and from 1999, many universities were approved to conduct pilot projects of modern distance education. In 2010, the “National Medium and Long-term Education Reform and Development Plan (2010–2020)” emphasized the need to “speed up the popularization of terminal facilities, promote the construction of

digital campuses, and realize multiple ways to access the Internet". Thanks to the Chinese government's proactive deployment of educational technology information and the promotion of "Internet+ Education", the popularity of online education and the number of online educational resources in China have been increased. During the epidemic, Chinese online teaching system not only met the teaching and learning needs of most university teachers and students in a timely manner, but also ensured the smooth development of higher education teaching work. It directly promoted the transformation of higher education mode from offline to online, which truly achieved the goal of "stopping classes without stopping learning, stopping classes without stopping teaching". Online teaching, as a result, is a useful supplement to offline education, and ensures the higher academic continuing education progress and quality during the epidemic prevention and control.

## **2.2 Major Epidemic Accelerates the Development of Online Teaching Model for Higher Academic Continuing Education**

The sudden outbreak of the epidemic has catalyzed the transformation of the teaching mode of higher academic continuing education on one hand. In response to the Ministry of Education's initiative of "using online platforms to teach lectures without stopping learning", most Chinese provinces and municipalities launched a clear guidance program for online teaching in February 2020. The online teaching modes used by universities mainly include live web teaching, online recorded courses, and students' independent learning [7]. In addition, in order to guarantee and serve teachers to adapt to online teaching, the Chinese Ministry of Education has specifically provided online teaching ability training resource packages for teachers so that they can possess targeted online education ability training according to their actual situation. Through above measures, various types of teaching in higher academic continuing education have been implemented steadily and effectively, and the online teaching mode has been developed rapidly during the epidemic.

On the other hand, it also accelerated the promotion and application of the combined online and offline teaching mode. In this special period, online teaching was fully spread in the field of higher academic continuing education, nevertheless, online teaching can only be a supplement to offline teaching and cannot become mainstream [8]. It is because higher academic continuing education is different from full-time study, and higher academic continuing education, due to its special characteristics, needs to make students master the corresponding skills through face-to-face training on the basis of fulfilling the assigned academic compensation function. Therefore, the further development of online teaching mode during the epidemic and even in the post-epidemic era is the construction and implementation of offline or combined online and offline teaching mode in the future.

## **2.3 Consideration of the Transformation of Higher Academic Continuing Education Based on the Major Epidemic**

The epidemic is the fastest spreading, most widely infected, and most difficult controlling major public health emergency that have occurred in China since the founding of

New China. This epidemic is not only a test for the national medical system, but also an in-depth test for the medical staff and the level of health knowledge of the whole population. All these aspects need to be alleviated and solved through continuous continuing education efforts.

As discussed above, the epidemic has triggered changes in the orientation, teaching mode and service function of higher academic continuing education. In the future, higher academic continuing education will take on greater responsibility to complete academic compensation while also promote its innovation and transformation, so as to enhance the construction of professional talents in the industry.

### **3 The Realistic Shortage of Transformation of Higher Academic Continuing Education in the Context of the Epidemic**

During the epidemic, higher academic continuing education quickly switched to online teaching to meet the learning needs of students in order to continue teaching. However, there are many practical problems that have come to light in the implementation of online teaching.

#### **3.1 Backward Construction of Online Teaching Platform**

The subjects of higher academic continuing education are adults, and there are obvious differences compared with full-time general higher education. Firstly, higher academic continuing education is decentralized. Unlike full-time higher education students who can be allocated school dormitories, students in continuing education often need to rent their own rooms. Secondly, the class size of higher academic continuing education is large, usually is two to five times of the size of full-time higher education class [9]. Finally, there is a general contradiction between study and work among students of higher academic continuing education [10], as these students are studying outside of work. Unified and centralized offline teaching has been the conventional mode of higher academic continuing education, and there have generally been fewer attempts to teach online, which has led to a lag in the construction of online teaching platforms for higher academic continuing education [11]. After the outbreak of the epidemic, the lack of experience in building online teaching platforms in higher academic continuing education caused less effective teaching effect. Therefore, in the transition period, there is an urgent need for universities to build a stable-running, independent and systematic online teaching platform.

#### **3.2 Lack of Online Course Resources**

At present, the online course resources of higher academic continuing education are still relatively scarce. Firstly, these resources are seriously homogenized [12]. During the epidemic, the focus of colleges and universities was on full-time education, and in order to ensure its smooth development, they spent most of their time and money on the planning and development of full-time higher education course resources. In contrast,

higher academic continuing education only borrowed full-time higher education course resources to carry out online teaching.

Secondly, there is an imbalance in the supply of online course resources for higher academic continuing education. Since universities did not pay much attention to the development and preservation of online course resources for higher academic continuing education, they could not supply rich course resources quickly in a short time [13]. Higher academic continuing education can only ensure normal teaching by borrowing public online courses resources made by other universities, while most resources serve full-time general higher education. As a result, there are few online courses that could meet the requirements for continuing higher education.

Finally, the quality of online courses for higher academic continuing education is not high. Most of the existing online courses are outdated online teaching videos, which, on the one hand, are of low quality due to their long history, with problems such as unclear picture quality, and unsynchronized sound and picture. On the other hand, the content of these online courses is not “hot topics” and does not show the current cutting-edge subject knowledge [14].

### **3.3 Difficulties Faced by Teachers in Conducting Online Teaching**

Teachers, who are the main body of teaching, need to quickly change their teaching mode and use information technology to implement teaching during the special period of epidemic prevention and control. The challenges they face include adaptation to the environment, technology ability, and mental state [15]. For example, firstly, some teachers face difficulties in matching, as not all classes are suitable for online teaching, such as those that are more hands-on, medical specialty. Secondly, some teachers have technical difficulties, as these teachers are older and not familiar with the technology of using the online teaching platform. Thirdly, some teachers have psychological adaptation difficulties. These teachers are often unable to control online teaching as flexibly as offline teaching for a variety of psychological reasons, such as nervousness in front of the camera, fear of being questioned about their teaching, or fear of not having the experience to teach live [16, 17].

## **4 Recommendations for the Implementation of Online Teaching and Learning in Higher Academic Continuing Education**

The online teaching system of higher academic continuing education is complex and has many links, which requires an all-round layout and multi-departmental linkage in order to run the online teaching system continuously and efficiently and train more professional talents. The key points of implementation of higher academic continuing education to guarantee its online teaching quality include the following aspects.

### **4.1 Improve Online Teaching Platform to Meet Students’ Needs**

Optimizing the online teaching platform for higher academic continuing education is a need to reform the traditional teaching mode and improve the quality of teaching. The

establishment of an online teaching platform for higher academic continuing education is not only a technical platform for universities to realize teaching in the context of the epidemic, but also creates a special learning environment for students. The online platform can provide students with various learning and communication tools, and also supports course playback and real-time communication, which is conducive to guiding students' independent learning and stimulating their learning motivation [18]. Thus, in order to meet students' diverse and personalized learning needs, universities first need to establish online teaching mode with rich learning resources. Additionally, they also need to perfect technical systems, such as introduce advanced teaching aids, strengthen online teaching operation and maintenance techniques, and ensure server stability.

## **4.2 Update Online Course Resources to Improve Teaching Quality**

In order to alleviate the difficulties of shortage of online course resources, higher academic continuing education needs to carefully design an online course system that conforms to the law of continuing education, and provide learners with rich and personalized online course resources through various ways. The design of online courses for higher academic continuing education should be first based on students' cognitive level. Meanwhile, innovative theoretical foundation structure, emphasis on practical case skills teaching, and scientifically design diversified and high-quality online resources, so that online course resources can be better adapted to teaching contents. In the process of developing teaching courses, on the one hand, universities should make good use of open online resources, such as the open high-quality courses of domestic and foreign universities and the cutting-edge research results [19]. On the other hand, it is also essential to design high-quality online courses for higher academic continuing education through the collaboration of multiple universities, so as to achieve data interoperability and resource sharing among universities and continuously promote the transformation and development of higher academic continuing education [20].

## **4.3 Focusing on Teacher Training to Enhance Teaching Ability**

Under the online teaching mode of higher academic continuing education, colleges and universities should enhance the construction of a sufficient quantity, optimized structure, and innovative consciousness teaching staff. On the one hand, the professional ability of continuing education teachers should be strengthened [21]. Teachers should have a deep grasp of subject knowledge and conduct various teaching designs so as to find a suitable teaching mode for students of higher academic continuing education. During students' learning, teachers need to act as good collaborators, guides and participants. Not only do they need to create a good learning atmosphere for students and stimulate their interest in learning, they also need to listen to the suggestions of students and colleagues in time and constantly reflect on and improve their teaching mode. On the other hand, universities should strengthen the cultivation of higher education teachers' online teaching ability, such as information technology ability, online teaching interaction ability, online teaching management and evaluation ability, etc. [22]. In this way, teachers can conform to the development requirements of the times, change their educational

concept, actively adapt to the network teaching mode and ensure the quality of network teaching in colleges and universities.

## 5 Conclusion

Online teaching is an emergency option to deal with the epidemic, and it foreshadows the future direction of teaching mode. This paper analyses the practical difficulties of online teaching of Chinese higher academic continuing education in the context of the epidemic and provides some insights for universities. For higher academic continuing education, it is necessary to plan ahead and innovate at this special period, so as to continuously promote the transformation and development of continuing education in universities and play a greater role in building a lifelong education system.

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