

Network Courses: Current Status, Problems and Future Development

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Abstract

Network course is an indispensable resource of distance education, and it's also the crucial issue of educational reform and innovation. The article first elaborates on the connotation and characteristics of network course, and then it explores the theoretical basis within the background of the network course construction and application in China. The authors put forward some constructive suggestions and improvement strategies based on the present problems.

Keywords: network courses, construction and application, problems and improvements.

Introduction

With the development of the projects such as "The New Century Network Course Construction Project", a great number of network courses are developed. "The Educational Informatization 10-year Development Plan" (2011-2020) indicates: the government will establish high-quality digital educational resources and build a shared environment, and support the intercollegiate elective network courses and resources sharing activities, and develop 20,000 high-quality network courses and constantly update quality digital resources to meet the needs of all types of education at all levels. The government has shifted the

focus of the network course construction from quantity to quality, and this makes the probe of the connotations of network courses imperative.

1. Definition and connotation of the network courses

Network courses refer to all the teaching contents and teaching activities of certain disciplinary through the network. The basic characteristics of network courses are interactivity, sharing, openness, collaboration and autonomy. Reviewing the definition of network courses, each definition implies the theoretical basis of its own, has its own rationale, but there are some limitations: (1) Network course is the integration of network and curriculum, and it's not simply the juxtaposition of the two. (2) The course is fundamental, the network is the soul. (3) Network course is internalized in the learner, and it is learner-based.

2. Current status and problems of the network courses

Network courses have gradually transferred from the first generation of web pages providing teaching materials and resources to the second generation courses that have asynchronous two-way exchange function, and now to the third generation courses of video conferencing systems that have the function of synchronous two-way communication in

China. Liang et al. (2002) affirm the achievements in development of network courses, and claim that both the quality and quantity of the existing network courses are unable to meet the needs of online learners. There is a lack of the aspects of the research study, collaborative learning design as well as the organization and implementation of guidance and advice. Zhang et al. (2006) point out that the common problem in current network course construction is “emphasis course development, little attention to applications, neglect of management”. Owing to the lack of effective organization and process management, it will result in a waste of curriculum resources. ^[1] On the basis of previous researches, combined with our own practical experience, we list the following problems of network courses:

2.1 Emphasis on macro-construction planning, neglect micro-management and application

Examining the development of network courses in China, both the government and the university have done a good job in terms of macro-planning and construction. As to the micro-management applications in these courses, there are still some problems. First, the institutional environment of network courses operation has not really matured, and the input of funds and their use mechanism is not clear; Secondly, some colleges and universities, and “Wang Xiao(network schools)” management department haven’t clear regulations on management responsibilities. Thirdly, there is a lack of network course construction supervision and guidance, and a lack of effective quality control system and evaluation system; Finally, there is a lack of the network teaching management provisions, calculation of

the workload of teachers teaching standards and evaluation systems.

2.2 Emphasis on teaching content presentation means, neglect the way of integration of knowledge and learning

Currently, most programs emphasized “teaching”, emphasized the imparting of knowledge, but there is a lack of teaching organizational design, it’s just a simple cram of resources. In the process of network course production, more consideration are from the perspective of teachers, and there is an insufficient consideration of the characteristics of the student's age, background knowledge, cognitive characteristics, learning needs, and many other factors. Dole (2000) pointed out that the richness refers to the depth of the curriculum, the levels of significance, a variety of possibilities and multiple interpretations. ^[2] Most of the network course organization is linear, learners will encounter problems in the learning process, especially in knowledge convergence and the switching in the learning units when searching and retrieving.

2.3 Emphasis on learning resources construction, neglect interaction design

Network course refers to the curriculum forms integrated through text, video, audio, animation, and other media. Owing to the large number of the network users, designers and teachers may not be able to predict the original cognitive structure and level of network learners. This requires the network courses to provide a lot of links and network resources for learners to search, read and learn. On the other hand, emotional communication and social skill are neglected.

2.4 Evaluation and feedback system is not perfect

Currently, many network course evaluation and feedback systems are not perfect. Evaluation is a test of the quality of the network course teaching. Network course evaluation methods include expert evaluation, peer evaluation, student evaluation. The design of feedback network learning space should include timely feedback and standardized evaluation system.

3. The network course improvements

How to effectively take the advantage of network course, and get rid of the restrictions of the popularization and development in the application of network courses is not a technical problem, but a question of teaching ideas, learning theory and technology of how to effectively grafted.

3.1 Relocation and the building of network courses

First, it is important to locate people in network courses. If teachers reject network teaching, fear of the network's possibility of replacing their authoritative position, they would not actively participate in online education, and it will be difficult to develop high-quality courses. At the same time, if the learners do not have the capacity and skills of the computer, or they are accustomed to the traditional teaching of spoon-feeding without accustomed to explore collaboration in independent study and peer networking courses, the network course cannot developed very well. The second question is network courses location. Network courses are both a new way of learning and a way of life. Finally, the network may not be suitable for all topics, and educators must first clearly

understand of their needs and material conditions, and then decide whether to adopt the web-based teaching. Therefore, the construction of the network courses should be based on conditions and discipline characteristics of the universities and colleges.

3.2 Formation of a network course production team, joint research and development of network Curriculum Group

Since there is a gap between the different institutions in school size, computer application equipment and teaching resources, the number of network course developed, quality gaps are obvious. This restricts the inter-college sharing of course materials of quality network courses. Therefore, it is particularly necessary to build a network course production team (Buckley, 2000).^[3] The teaching team is divided into class type, collaborative-type, mixing of the three different types. In the beginning of the joint research and network course development, an experienced university with a strong willingness to advocate inter-college collaboration can serve as the organizer of the joint research. Hierarchical relationships should not be over-emphasized in the process of building collaborative teams, the subjective position of the participants should be respected for, and a curriculum learning community should be jointly built. Network course production team should establish a reasonable knowledge structure, focus on the overall optimization of the curriculum, and reflect the characteristics of subjects in teaching based on the development of the network course cluster. This will strengthen cooperation and exchanges among higher institutions.

3.3 Improve the supervision and management of the evaluation system and mechanism

The construction and application requires a strong security mechanism and perfect supervision and management and evaluation system. In the process of construction of network course, the environment is the foundation elements and the guarantee of the innovation.^[4] Evaluation is not independent of the course content, but integrating in the process of learning. Therefore, designers, teachers, experts should carry out the initial evaluation. In the process of the network course implementation and application, the formation of multi-angle evaluation by teachers, designers, experts, students, network administrator is very important. The evaluating contents should be multi-faceted, and multi-channel of evaluation methods should be established to realize the aim of promote learning by a combined dynamic evaluation system.

3.4 Pursuit of high performance and regulation of network ethical culture

In order to make a good use of the limited educational resources, we need to consider the potential benefits of network courses. First, we should consider that whether the network courses have changed people's traditional concept of a learning or even a way of living; Secondly, whether the education of the people who cannot receive a formal education through E-Learning is recognized by society; Finally, we should see the long-term impact of the theory and practice on the country's future talent training system. Modern education appears to be technical behavior modernization, but at a deeper level it is the moral modernization standard of this interactive process. Curriculum has a

cultural nature. Therefore, in the pursuit of performance, we should regulate network ethical culture, integrate culture into the curriculum knowledge, and build a harmonious network moral culture.

4. Conclusion

The development trend of distance education has shifted from the "supply-driven" to a "demand-driven" education, its key feature is to promote educational institutions to find alternative ways to convene "customers" to communicate with each other and share their learning experience.^[5] Network courses will surely have different problems at different stages of its development, and this requires different responses to those problems.

5. References

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