

Enhance Cohesive Strength and Extend Collaboration

Capacity Building in China's Radio & TV Universities

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[Abstract]

China's Radio & TV Universities, a nation-wide distance education system in China, constitute one of the mega universities in the world. Through more than 28-year's practice and development, they have offered opportunities to a large number of learners via multimedia technology in the Chinese society and made great contribution to the realization of education equity and social justice.

To look at China's Radio and TV Universities' achievements in the past, the author takes the view that one of the advantages for a large ODL system actually lies in its systematic management and collaborative mechanism. The merits for systematic school running reflect in resources sharing, standards setting, and effective management. The model of China shows that some developing countries should adhere to the principle of capacity building and fix its eyes on quality education through feasible measures. A developing country should not only concentrate on constructing learning resources, but also on staff development to enhance its cohesive strength and attain its sustainable development. Furthermore, on the basis of that, it should extend more collaboration between faculties and institutions so that innovation and vitality can be introduced and capacity of competitiveness can be cultivated.

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(Full Paper)

China's terrestrial ground space ranks third in the world, constituting 1/15 of the world's total terrestrial ground space and 1/4 of that of Asia. But China, a country with a high and uneven terrain, has the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau, which is known as the "roof of the world" for its average elevation of 4,500 meters, and plenty of deserts and hilly areas. The area of plain in China only accounts for 12% of its total terrestrial ground space.

In addition, with a population of 1.3 billion, China's population is the largest in the world but not well distributed. China's west occupies more than half of the country's land, but people living there make up only 5% of the total population, while China's east occupies less than half of the country's total ground space, but 95% of the population live there.

Also, with 56 nationalities, China is a country that has the most nationalities. And most of these nationalities have their own languages.

Obviously, it is a more difficult task to popularize higher education in a country with so large a population and so complicated natural environments than in developed countries.

Alongside China's economic advances, people's needs for education have grown increasingly stronger. How to materialize comprehensive utilization of the social resources and provide services for the broad masses of the people, especially supplying higher education for the rural areas, border areas and regions inhabited by ethnic groups, has now become the most pressing problem to be solved.

One of the ways to solve this problem in China is to devote major efforts to developing distance education. Setting the school running orientation as "oriented towards local areas, basic-level areas, rural areas, and outlying and ethnic-group areas" and using the distance education system of China's radio and TV universities, we have made outstanding contributions for the popularization of higher education.

Using modern teaching methods like radio and television and internet, radio and TV universities have educated a large number of applied higher education professional talents for our society, particularly remote border areas. Among them, an

accumulative total of university or college graduates have come to over 6 million, and an accumulative total of various kinds of non-university or non-college trainees have reached over 40 million person-times. Admissions in the 8 years from 1999 to 2007 totaled 4.58 million and 2.38 million completed their undergraduate courses, approximately accounting for 1/8 of the total admissions at various forms of higher education and 1/3 of the total admissions of continuing higher education of the corresponding period. With the establishment of open environments for learning, the open education system will give people more learning opportunities and at the same time meet their varied needs for learning in different ways.

As has been acquainted with many people from the same occupation, the usually so-called China's Radio and TV Universities are a nation-wide distance open education teaching and teaching management system in China rather than a certain specific educational institution. China's radio and TV education is actually a teaching network that comprises Central Radio and TV University, local radio and TV universities at various levels and even teaching points, covering all the urban and rural areas all over the country and rationally distributed.

Up to 2007, apart from Central Radio and TV University, China has set up 44 radio and TV universities at the provincial level, 956 branch radio and TV universities at the district and municipal level, 1875 radio and TV working stations and 3292 teaching points at the county level. The organic combination of radio and TV universities at various levels achieved via satellite and the internet has set up a service platform for the establishment a lifelong education system as well as a learning-oriented society.

Two important factors attribute to the abovementioned achievements, one is the strong cohesiveness of the system and the other the realizations of the superiority of multi-sided collaboration.

I□ Bring into Full Play the Resources of Central Radio and TV University and Gather together the Initiative of China's Radio and TV Universities at All Levels

With Central Radio and TV University lying at the pinnacle of this teaching network, the radio and TV universities at the provincial level lying in the middle, serving as a link between what goes above and what comes after, and the teaching points spread all over the urban and rural areas throughout the country directly giving students backing in their learning programs, an extensive pyramid-shaped educational network takes shape.

In this educational network, the division of responsibility and the relationship between rights and duties attached to Central Radio and TV University and the radio and TV universities at various levels are made clear by signing agreements, forming a modern

distance education system under which overall planning, classified administration, division of labor coupled with collaboration, and classified guidance etc. are carried out in all the links such as admission enrolment, teaching and teaching management, and test and examination work.

Central Radio and TV University is responsible for a series of support services related to learning such as teaching design, teaching management and providing teaching resources, making it possible for each teaching point and each learner located at the terminals of the system to have easy access to the top-notch quality resources owned by Central Radio and TV University and share the lectures by all the master teachers from all over the country.

Guided by Central Radio and TV University, China's radio and TV universities at different levels, in association with the teaching practice carried out in their own areas, vigorously explore the teaching models that are suited to their own circumstances. The advantage of systematic school running is fully displayed in local radio and TV universities' (as they face the students directly) capability and elasticity of assuming the tasks of teaching and doing management work in massive quantities and meeting their local demands.

Through normalizing the unity of the system, bring the advantage of quality guarantee into full play. On the basis of "five unities," unity of subjects, unity of teaching program (syllabus), unity in textbooks, unity in examinations and unity in marking papers, China's radio and TV universities have brought about optimization regrouping and sharing of education resources and ensured teaching quality and overall efficiency.

This learning environment, with satellite (network in the sky) and the internet (network on the earth) as a means of teaching and Central and local (network of people) radio and TV universities combining into one, is one that other forms of education do not possess. Each terminal of the network, or each sector or point, or the pinnacle of the network can all give full play to their own advantages and attain a mutual complimentary effect.

II. Expand Opening-up and Extend Collaboration

China's radio and TV universities are a group of open universities with distinctive features in school-running models. Their school-running principle, school-running style and system management modes are marked at every moment by openness and collaboration.

1. First of all, they are open to all the learners

Open to learners: Diversified forms school-running are targeted on people in

employment, officers and rank and file soldiers, peasants, and the handicapped, etc.; university or college education is coupled with non-university or non-college education, which help to meet the varied needs of all people for learning in different ways. More than 3/4 of the students studying in radio and TV universities come from the administrative regions below the district and municipal level and more than 90% of the students are people in employment above 21 years old.

Open in learning manners: Top priority is given to students' freedom in learning. Students are free to choose courses offered from the "curriculum supermarket," and their credits will be valid in eight years. As a result, students can deposit their credits as if depositing money in the bank.

Open in learning environment: Satellite-based digital transmission platform, computer network, and distance teaching platform have led to the materialization of networking of various teaching resources, digitization of multimedia and two-way interactive learning with students at the center. In addition, special learning-related services are also provided for the students.

2. Integrate resources from society

An outstanding characteristic shared by China's radio and TV universities is running school by integrating resources from society.

Teaching staff: There are 85 thousand full-time teachers and 38 thousand part-time teachers in China's radio and TV universities. There are only 133 full-time teachers, but 1126 part-time teachers, including chief editors and lecturers in Central Radio and TV University.

Integration and utilization of education resources: integrate and utilize the top quality education resources from institutions of higher learning, scientific research institutes, state ministries and commissions, industrial businesses and radio and TV universities themselves.

It was only by bringing about the integration of resources from the whole society that China's radio and TV universities came up to this non-conventional progress, successfully creating education opportunities for millions of students in such a developing country like China.

3. Strengthen collaboration with other institutions and organizations

A prominent feature China's radio and TV universities have developed from their operations in school running in the past three decades is the extensive participation of many institutions and organizations from the whole society. Seizing the initiative in allying themselves with institutions of higher learning, industries and businesses to

push collaborative school running, China's radio and TV universities use the labs and instrument facilities of other institutions of higher learning, scientific research institutes and industrial enterprises and bring into play all social resources to promote the development of the education cause of radio and TV universities, which, as a result, have strengthened China's radio and TV universities' flexibility of meeting the needs of society in the fields of deciding on the structure, specialties offered and education objectives. Furthermore, the collaboration with enterprises and institutions China's radio and TV universities have conducted has also enhanced the development of a large number of application-oriented talents needed in economic construction and has helped the universities to set more accurate objectives.

4. Provide the public with learning backing service platforms

Using education resources from China's radio and TV universities, Central Radio and TV University has also established distance education public service system that provides institutions of higher learning and other education agencies with learning backing services while they carry out distance education programs.

For this purpose, Central Radio and TV University has set up a special agency which aims at providing public services for many other distance education universities and institutions in China. The principle obligations of this public service system include, by establishing service platforms that can be shared by the whole society, assisting education agencies in providing various kinds of backing services for distance learners, satisfying the learners' needs to complete their studies, and at the same time helping education agencies to successfully carry out their administrative and conventional teaching management work which is outside teaching itself, setting the stage for sharing the resources individually owned by education agencies and recognizing each other's credits.

5. Develop overseas collaboration

Alongside China's reform and opening up to the outside world and advances in economic construction, more and more people from the world feel that they need to know more about China and, for this reason, they are interested in learning the Chinese language.

Many countries in Europe and North America also take the Chinese language as one of the foreign language courses offered in their primary and secondary schools. However, inadequate teaching staff and teaching resources that are needed to meet such demands still lie ahead of these schools and education institutions abroad. Moreover, the fact that usually students taking this course are comparatively few makes it a difficult job to begin classes. Distance education can just serve to solve these thorny problems effectively on shortage of teaching staff and decentralization of students and make it possible for all to share the top quality teaching resources.

Central Radio and TV University has done two things in developing collaboration with countries outside China. First, starting teaching Chinese on TV using US's SCOLA satellite TV channel, providing American university and secondary school students with TV classes that reflect the life of contemporary Chinese people. Secondly, opening the Confucius Institute Online in collaboration with the State University of Michigan, USA, the first one ever established throughout the world.

Central Radio and TV University is responsible for the construction of online teaching resources and American students learn Chinese online and are given a certain amount of time per week to receive individual tutorial online. At present, tutorials give person-to-person guidance in the U.S. to students through the internet. And students are now being recruited from among China's universities who will act as volunteer tutors based in China and give guidance to American students learning Chinese. This is also a reflection of the advantage of the internet.

In the past few years Central Radio and TV University has attached greater importance to developing collaboration and exchanges with countries outside China. Through exchanging information and establishing links with distance education agencies from all the countries in the world, we have gained a wider vision and a greater ability. Actually, Central Radio and TV University started to develop wide-ranging exchanges and collaboration with distance education agencies in Africa. We translated our audio and video teaching material "Practical Technology on Agriculture" into English and French and gave them to some African countries. We also sent inspection teams to South Africa and Egypt to learn about the development of distance education in Africa. China and African countries have many things in common. All are developing countries, vast in territory, decentralized in population and underdeveloped in education. Therefore, many of the problems that crop up from these countries are identical. We're ready to exchange ideas and conduct further studies on distance education with our African friends. We also hope you African friends will come to China, have a closer look at China's radio and TV universities and conduct your studies. Let's act in concert and make our contributions for the harmonious progress of our societies and help more and more people to gain access to good education.

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