

Life Long Education and Continuing Education

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Abstract

Life long learning is an International education trend and an education idea, the development of life long learning is closely interrelated to the changing social economy and political background, and the life long learning is a product of the modern social development. In order to keep balance of self development and social change, people look forward to continuously renewing and enriching their own intellectual structure and skill quality through accepting continuing education. As an important component of life long learning, continuing education becomes a significant way of constructing life long learning system.

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Life long education is a kind of education idea which adapts to various changes of current society. Social development, scientific and technological progress, and knowledge renewal increasingly speeds up. Economic development and social progress necessarily results in change of economic, industrial and occupational structure, which necessarily causes significant changes of requirements for labor force, thereby raising higher requirements to quality of people. The 21st century is an era that global economy as well as science and technology are in unprecedentedly intense competition which in the last analysis is competition between science and technology as well as talents. The foundation of science and technology as well as talents is education, so it has become an issue commonly faced by the global educational circles that how to establish an educational system meeting requirements of life long education of people under the background of knowledge-driven economy era and learning society, which has also become guidelines of educational reform for many countries, and even direction and goal of China's educational reform.

I. Life long education is an eternal subject of harmonious society building.

The knowledge itself needs to be continuously renewed, and people mastering knowledge naturally need to renew knowledge in time, thereby making the learning become a continuing activity which runs through the whole life. In present society, staff in service have to meet requirements of resource socialization, distribution marketization and utilization valuation, in order to meet operating requirements of market economy. It has become a basic idea that "innovation talents are capital." New knowledge and technology has high distributing rate in current social environment, and fast distribution consequentially results in requirements for quick renewal of knowledge and technology, thereby promoting production new things. Since renewal rate of knowledge is raised and half-life of knowledge is shortened, staff in service need to continuously supplement new knowledge for themselves and accept new information, so that they can adapt to changes of occupational requirements. Educational services must provide flexible and various courses, according to social requirements, learners' requirements and local practice.

Life long education emphasizes on free, comprehensive and continuing development of people. In order to keep balance of self development and social change, people expect to constantly renew and supplement self intellectual structure and skill quality through accepting continuing education, so study is as important as working. Since people's existence, free and comprehensive development is a kind of inner tendency which promotes social development. If there is any social crisis of harmonious society, it must be that subsistence right of disadvantaged groups faces challenge, which results from the fact that educational lag and unfairness is enlarged. Therefore, life long education is an eternal subject of harmonious society building.

It is an inevitable trend of the 21st China's educational development to establish and perfect a life long educational system which is suitable for China. Continuing education is an important part of life long education system, an important part of China's higher education, and important content and means for China's "science and education strategy" and talents construction, so that it plays a key role in constructing life long education system. Continuing education

is a foundation and life long education is a goal, two of which are mutually related, interacted and blended.

II. Continuing educational pattern of China

The idea of life long education is foundation and developing direction of continuing education. The basic idea of continuing education was derived from social reeducation and pan-socialized education, and continuing education consequently will further be developed to the life long education direction that public education is combined with social education and formal education is combined with informal education. At present, higher education in China's national education series comprises regular higher education, adult higher education, self-study higher education examination, radio and television university, modern distance education and the like. Since from the Reform and Opening, China has been developing various forms of higher education for meeting social requirements, and these forms include regular higher education (expansively enrolling) which is normally formal university; self-study higher education examination; the national higher education exams for self-taught adults; distance education (network education); and radio and television university. These educational qualifications are different in forms and issuance ways, but all admitted by the nation, and students who have those educational qualifications can further study to get degrees of bachelor, master and doctor, and can even go abroad, apply for a job, promote to a higher position, raise salary and so on. However, their social recognition degrees are different.

Based on China's life long education idea, school running forms of continuing education in China include radio and television university, worker's college, peasants' college, institute for administration, educational college, independent correspondence college, continuing education run by regular higher education institutes (including division of correspondence, evening school, and pedagogical course), satellite-transmitted television education, self-study higher education examination and other adult higher educations which include secondary specialized school for adults, adult high school, adult technical training school, peasant cultural and technical school, peasant radio and television university, self-study examination of technical secondary school, and other adult secondary and elementary education. Furthermore, there are various kinds of correspondence and oral instruction schools in the nature of further education, training and tutoring. The school-running organizations mentioned above provide students with various kinds of learning ways, such as learning through being full-time taught in classroom; self-learning through being provided with teaching material, tape and video material, and long distant tutoring; learning in the way of fully and half releasing from one's regular work; and learning in spare time. According to social requirements and self conditions, those school-running organizations provide many kinds of courses, such as art, science, engineering, agriculture, medicine science, finance and economics, politics and law, education, physical education, and the like. Based on ensuring educational qualifications standard, the school-running organizations provide teaching content as much as they can to meet requirements of students.

III. Continuing education is an important part of life long education.

The substantial meaning of continuing education has a long-term goal of fostering fully developed new talents, which makes continuing education become a bridge for adults to achieve an ideal degree. Therefore, continuing education has been developed to a situation with many levels, changes and opportunities in recent years, has become an important means for establishing life long education system and promoting the building of learning type society, and also has become one source of life long education ideas.

Continuing education and life long education are closely related and cannot be separated, wherein life long education emphasizes on "lifelong" characteristic of education, naturally contains "continuing" characteristic of education, and regards education as an element which runs through the whole life. Continuing education is a novel education form which is between the traditional public education and life long education, and also an earlier stage practice of life long education. Continuing education is more close to requirements of social and economical development, and as a bridge connecting the traditional public education and life long education, continuing education is an unavoidable stage of life long education. Life long education provides development of continuing education with theoretical and methodological foundation, and development of continuing education lays a strong foundation for forming and developing the life long education theory. The perfection of life long education needs a long developing period, and continuing education becomes a connecting link between the preceding and the following during that period.

Therefore, life long education and continuing education have a relationship of containing and being contained, and continuing education is an important part of life long education, even a highest level of life long education. Continuing education has significant status and function in life long education system, so whether continuing education can

be continuously optimized in correct direction not only concerns its self healthy development, but also concerns establishments and perfection of the whole life long education, and even concerns the “project of century-long significance” of the Chinese nation.

IV. Improving the quality of life long education is a starting point and a standpoint for colleges and universities to develop continuing education.

The developing direction of continuing education will still be promoting the civil life long education and raising the whole educational level of people, which means that continuing education cannot be developed into education industry, elite education, or diploma education. Continuing education is not only an important supplement of regular higher education, but also a significant part of social education and labor education. As cradles of high-level personnel, the regular colleges and universities certainly become main bodies of continuing education and life long education. Vigorously developing continuing education will be a significant measure for the colleges and universities to expand their education service and development space, and to meet a challenge of the era of knowledge-driven economy.

Firstly, continuing education is not regular higher education, and its central task is not educating national elites, but providing re-education and vocational training for undergraduates and general workers. Therefore, continuing education cannot be eager for quick success and instant benefit, it actually needs departments of continuing education to be flexible, adjust measures to local conditions, organize education activities according to students' requirements and purposes, provide lectures and trainings according to students' time and arrangement, and arrange content and courses according to students' future and development.

Secondly, continuing education pays more attention to quality of school running. Universities and continuing education organizations should develop continuing education, with the goal of improving teaching quality instead of seeking ecumenical benefit. Continuing education is not an economical source for organizations and regular universities. The most obvious characteristic of continuing education is a kind of indiscriminate education, and skills learning and students who get the skills must be corresponding. “Wide-in and strict-out” is a toll-gate of continuing education which must be guarded. Continuing education can be recognized only when students recognize the value and effect of continuing, thereby achieving the purpose of “education”.

Thirdly, cognitive competence of students needs to be developed. In the modernized society with high renewal speed of continuing education, it is important to understand necessary knowledge and skills of one or some vocations, and it is more important to rapidly master new knowledge and new skills. The students fostered by continuing education should be able to seize and utilize various opportunities to renew, deepen and fully carry out the original skills and knowledge system, and can continuously adapt to social changes.

Fourthly, we need to deepen the understanding, change the conceptions of continuing education, and fasten development of continuing education in colleges and universities. Continuing education needs to be developed as an important task of universities and colleges, and brought into development project of universities and colleges. In recent years, China's colleges and universities have done a lot of work on continuing education and gained good results. Many colleges and universities have established continuing education schools or corresponding organizations, which are in charge of planning, organizing and managing continuing education. However, in general, the continuing education development scale of China's colleges and universities does not meet objective requirements of society, and there still be a gap between China's and International continuing education. Therefore, the colleges and universities of China must further deepen the understanding of importance and urgency of continuing education development, overcome the misunderstanding of “valuing diploma education and despising continuing education” and “considering continuing education as an expedient measure and an extra earning measure”, establish the ideas of “continuing education is an important part of higher education” and “continuing education work is a significant part of colleges and universities' task”, and establish the idea of “vigorously developing continuing education at the same time when developing diploma education”. When the developing plans of colleges and universities are drawn up, the developing plans of continuing education also need to be considered, wherein the guiding theory and developing goal need to be made clear, and organization, outlay, policy, personnel, equipment, system and the like need to be ensured, thereby making the colleges and universities become a really important position for developing continuing education.

Fifthly, we need to follow the sustainable development view of continuing education, and value continuing education differentiation and individualized teaching. Sustainable development is a novel survival and development pattern chosen and established by people during the late period of 20th century, with the goal of pursuing overall benefit and

long term benefit. The development view that we mentioned based on the idea of life long education refers to individual sustainable development view, which is to develop constancy in length, harmony in width and penetrability in depth of physical strength, intelligence and emotional ability which are implicit in interior of individual life. The view of individual sustainable development has a basic content of pursuing optimization of life potential development, achieving harmony and perfection in moral, ability, learning, understanding, health and the like. The sustainable development of people relates to requesting, returning, inheriting and exceeding in the relationship among human, nature and society. It is not only a sustainable development process of people but also a reflection for enhancing people's initiative that continuously shows self-recognizing, self-designing, self-rebuilding and self-improving through internalizing the existing achievements.

It is one of core concepts of life long education theory that respecting difference and advocating individuality. The continuing education which is run through by life long education concept should more respect difference of learning individuality and should further advocate the development of individuality. Individuality which refers to a kind of characteristic owned by individual for distinguishing individuals and others is formed during the socializing process of continuously interacting with environment, which reflects a process of being created and recreated through continuously interacting with environment, generally including emotion, will, interest and so on. Will, interest, ability and the like of students in the continuing education stage have been directionally developed, which provides conditions for development of students' individuality. The overall development of individuality pursued by life long education requires continuing education schools to pay attention to individual development of students when arranging courses, to provide the students with differentiated teaching environment as possible as they can, to provide teaching process capable of reflecting students' individual initiative and individuation, to enhance students' ability for learning and accepting knowledge, to raise students' thinking level, and to develop wide thoughts, diverse interests and push-full spirit. The differentiated and individualized teaching will make the students fully fling themselves into learning life. The continuing education courses should pay attention to overall development of students' moral, intelligence, health and the like, need to emphasize coherence of students' inward world and motivated behavior, must think over students' accepting ability, interest, attitude and the like, and should comprehensively promote overall development of students' knowledge, emotion, will and behavior.