

Play the Roles of Beijing Adult Colleges in Developing Continuing Education

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Abstract

In the recent years, relying on industries (systems) and regions (communities), Beijing (independently created) state-owned adult higher education institutes (Beijing AHEI) have promoted the reforms of adult higher education and now continued to improve the quality of adult education. Beijing AHEI established continuing education systems that appeared as multi-formats, the programs were delivered through multi-channels at multi-levels, which created social and cultural learning programs for regional working adults in Beijing. These multi-complex continuing education systems were designed to meet with the needs of working adults and tightly linked with the development of capital economic and society, which improved the professional quality of entire scientific and technological community of China. These continuing educational programs trained thousands of applicable talents who then contributed to the development of China's capital economics and the advancement of the society. It shows clearly that Beijing adult colleges have played a dispensable role in establishing a learning-orientated society and life-long learning environment. This paper includes three sections: 1) Adult higher education plays one of the key roles in popularizing universal higher education in Beijing; 2) Developing continuing education to promote a learning-orientated society of capital Beijing; and 3) Conclusions and considerations. The experiences of Beijing adult colleges in developing continuing education will be discussed in this paper.

Keyword: Beijing (independent created) state-owned adult higher education institutes, adult higher education, continuing education

The motive of an educational reform and development comes mainly from the need of developing economic societies. Along with the development of China's economic society, the adult higher education in China has developed considerably, the programs of which were designed in multi-formats at various scales and delivered through multi-channels at multi-levels. At each stage across entire China's developmental history, the continuing education programs trained and then provided significant amount of applicable and practical talents to the country. In the recent years, the economy of Beijing maintained a fast but steady development; the regional GDP grows at an average of 12.1% and the financial revenue increased for successive years. As evidenced, all of the Beijing AHEI made contributions to the development of China's capital economic society in Beijing's developing process.

By applying a qualitative method of questionnaire survey and focus group discussions, we investigated continuing education systems at 18 Beijing AHEI, eight of which were founded by district government, six industry colleges, two ministry/bureau colleges, and two Beijing Municipal Education Commission colleges. This paper intended to evaluate comprehensively the current status and positions of continuing education systems in Beijing, as well as their future developmental potentials. The study showed that Beijing AHEI is generally positioned as institutions carrying out multiple educational functions. The funding of the institutes was primarily from the government and industry investment (57%) and the rest (43%) from operational income (e.g. tuitions) and other sources. The students were composed of both employed and unemployed adults. In the recent years, because of the effective and integrated funding sources, the facilities of Beijing AHEI were improved significantly; the quality of education and the faculty and administrative management teams were enhanced. The continuing education programs of these schools have now become one

of the important vehicles to meet the regional demand for universal higher education and diversified continuing education.

1. Adult higher education plays one of the key roles in popularizing universal higher education in Beijing

It is known that China is a developing country and its higher education system is still under a rapid development. As a result, current educational resources cannot fully meet with all of the Chinese people's demand for receiving higher education. Since the beginning of the 21st century, due to constant changes of adult learners' demand for education, the purposes or goals for receiving education, the employment status and ages, the format and specialty of educational programs appeared even more complex than ever. In addition, the urban construction and development of Beijing has attracted a huge amount of agricultural population to join city labor force, which has brought the government new challenges on how to train and educate this population. To meet with the challenges, Beijing adult higher education enhanced their own quality, continuously provided enriched high quality of education and played essential roles in a stage of Beijing where the system was transformed from individualized elite-education to popularized universal education resulting in a diversified higher education system and becoming a dispensable and important component of higher education system. As a part of this component, relying on industries and communities, Beijing AHEI devoted them to training industrial and regional talents and become "the colleges of working-adults".

(1) Strengthening the establishment of professional faculty team and enhancing education teaching reform.

The survey of 18 Beijing adult colleges showed: Out of 2872 full-time faculty members and administrative staffs, 46% (1325) of them are faculty members. Among the 1325 faculty members, 32% (424) have senior titles and 49% (649) have middle-level titles. Seven % (92) of the 1325 faculty members have doctoral degrees, 32% (424) Master degrees, and 57% (755) undergraduate degrees. In order to improve the professional composition (e.g. higher degrees) of faculty team as well as the quality/quantity, every college pays great attentions to training faculty members. The training vehicles included special training programs, studying overseas, certificate/license professional training, skill competition, forum or conferences, and build evaluation/reward systems. For instance, the Beijing Chaoyang Community College guided the teachers to formulate the career development plan in the areas of knowledge and professional skills. They sponsored a selective pool of teachers to receive various degree educations, on-the-job training and forum discussions. The Beijing Dongcheng Community College carried out activities including training, skill competition, and comprehensive evaluation to enhance the development of the professional team. They established a dynamic appraisal system that can reveal faculty members' professional quality in various aspects including development, management, and evaluation. The Beijing Chongwen Community College held specific conference focusing on teaching methodologies, reviewing an art professor Xinhua Ji's 33-year teaching experiences, and setting up a role model for all members to dedicate themselves to adult education career.

The programs designed by Beijing adult colleges were always closely linked with the market need. For example, the problematic areas identified in the market were considered as research subjects, the results of which were then used for teaching and carrying out reform. Further, the unique characteristics of adult learners were taken into consideration while establishing regulatory and appraisal systems. To obtain the best quality of education, colleges took measures not only on teachers but also on students. For instance, through process management, all colleges issued quality-reviewing regulations and some developed international evaluation systems, which promoted faculty members' quality consciousness. Faculty members participated actively in teaching research, focusing on teaching methodologies, process, and details. In the past three years, the 18 colleges undertook a total of 579 research projects and 406 of which were completed. They have published 243 books and chapters, 930 papers, and 593 teaching materials.

Based on a reform project founded by the Beijing Education Committee, e.g. "Regarding the research on how to implement ISO9001 authentication management by Beijing adult higher education institutes", Fengtai Community College introduced a modernized management concept on education, i.e. "trainees are college's priority". Based on an integration of ISO9000 standard with the characteristics of adult education, the college established a management system that controlled every single factor, step, and process of all activities to ensure the quality of teaching. The college also formulated quality control handbook, several dozens of procedural documents provided with matching instruction materials to guarantee the effective operation of the quality control system.

Beijing Xicheng Community College undertook a research project, e.g. “how to link the curriculum that trains adults’ comprehensive capability in English with practical teaching”, hence, the students received a well-rounded training in English covering the skills of listening, speaking, reading, writing, and translating, a mutual communication model was developed. This reformed teaching model stimulated students’ interests and initiatives in learning that improved students’ application ability.

The faculty members from Beijing Haidian Community College launched research projects focusing on teaching methodologies. They established a scientific standard and quality control system to provide services to teachers’ teaching and learners’ learning.

Beijing Shijingshan Community College developed an appraisal system that took various steps to ensure the teaching quality, including checking the quality in classes, collecting feedbacks from students’ focus group and students’ survey.

Beijing Construction Occupational Colleges established a committee composed of experts from the construction industry and decoration field, which play essential roles in designing programs, improving teaching method, and building up practical training bases.

Beijing Xuanwu Community College focused on training students’ to be more creatively innovative, and to have entrepreneurship. They encouraged learners to be more independent and more self-motivated in studying. These approaches improved students’ learning ability and study quality.

(2) Enhance the development of specialized disciplines and courses, improve the quality of teaching.

At present, Beijing AHEI developed more than a hundred majors in the fields of liberal arts, pure science, engineering, foreign languages, education, medicine, law, and art and so on. All colleges paid great attentions to developing specialized fields or disciplines, adjusting composition of disciplines to meet with the market needs, gradually to make the changes from “small but having all majors” to “specialized groups with their unique characteristics”. Some colleges passed specialized license evaluated by experts of Beijing Education Committee. Beijing Xicheng Community College reformed film and TV animation major training program designing a series of specialized fine courses. In 2008, Beijing Chaoyang Community College was granted a First Class reward for their achievement in “Talent training model in community colleges: Regional adult higher institutes’ role model in creative talent training innovation”. Beijing Chongwen Community College established a primary special field combining the majors of computer art design and new-multi-media design. A studio was built in the art department, functioning as a platform that carried out four types of activities, e.g. art education, art creation, commercial business development, and PR communication. This platform functioned as an open teaching and practical training base for teachers and students. Beijing Dongcheng Community College promoted goal-orientated management strategy. For the art major, the college developed new teaching model by classifying the art teaching into classics, level and layer prediction, and practical training. In addition, they performed a series of reform to promote innovation of teaching model. In order to improve the quality of education, the National Judge Institute invited senior judicial and police officers to participate in mentoring or practical training programs designed for fresh or junior judicial and police major students.

In all of the different developmental phases, each of the Beijing AHEI devoted their education to training talents for the Beijing economic society. The Beijing Municipal stated clearly that “Newly added labor force receives education for about 15 years” that help maintain the demand for higher education, occupational/professional or degree training. The survey showed that from 2005 to 2007, there were a total of a couple of ten thousands of students-talents were trained by the 18 Beijing AHEI. Among them, a total of 37811 were junior undergraduates (AA degrees), 8819 students were advanced from AA to Bachelor degrees (BA); 6650 were BA undergraduates. The age analysis showed 54% of the students were older than 22, out of which, 59% were females and 61% of them came from the local areas. Further, 78% of BA undergraduates were from local, 83% of which were older than 22, and 43% were females. Out of the 18 colleges, 11 owned teaching stations affiliated with Beijing TV College. The total numbers of the full-time BA students receiving TV College training were 10967, AA students 16698. In the recent three years, the student numbers including (BA or AA degree) of Beijing TV College have remained a steady grow.

2. Developing continuing education to create a learning-orientated society of capital Beijing

On June 23, 1987, the State Education Commission issued a document of “The Decisions about Reforms

and Development of Adult Education”, which stated “The target of adult education is primarily composed of those who are already employed. Continuing education can effectively improve the quality of labors and office workers as individuals, and further to increase economic efficiency and productivity. Meanwhile, adult education plays essential roles in training citizens for the socialist society, to make the citizens have life goals and moral integrity and be more civilized and disciplined. Further, adult education helps to create a learning-orientated atmosphere, which is essential to promoting democracy, improving the legal system, and promoting stability and unity of the society.” The 16th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CCP) proposed a goal, e.g. “To create a well-off society in an all round way”, “To build a learning-orientated society in which all people study and learn through their life-time, thus to promote human beings’ well-rounded development”. The 17th Central Committee of CCP focused on “enhancing innovative capability to create a innovative country”, which was the key of national development strategies and approaches to increasing overall national strength, prioritizing educational development and build strong human resources.

Due to modern societies’ complicated and diversified political and economic structures, people’s employment status and life style become more complex; therefore, the demand for receiving education remains constant changes towards diversification and individualization. Additionally, the rapid development of science and technology and the increased and improved quality of people’s life has also enhanced demands for all types of education. Furthermore, the trend of receiving education falls more towards the direction of satisfying personal needs and improving individuals’ overall quality and self-cultivation. Life-long learning is therefore taken as parts of people’s life. Creating a learning-orientated society and a life-long learning environment becomes not only an important factor for realizing the dream of creating well-off society, but also a key approach to enhancing social stability, resolving social conflicts, and raising the quality of capital citizens’ civilization and the level of city’s civilization. The Beijing Central Committee of CCP and Beijing Municipal discussed the government’s requirement in an issued document, e.g. “The decision regarding how to promote the creation of capital learning-oriented city”, it asked people “To promote education in communities, satisfying community residents’ demand for diversified learning”. It also indicated “Community colleges should play key roles in educating community residence, thus to form educational networks that rely on community colleges’ leadership, use smaller-regional educational centers or schools as key players, and middle and elementary schools, citizen adult schools, village adult schools, and family education as bases. Multi-layers, diversified content, and multi-format occupational skill training and social cultural education are carried out. To provide middle and elementary students with good after school programs and also to provide services for learning among the groups of preschool kids, non-permanent residence, handicap people, unemployed people as well as seniors, hence to raise citizens’ overall quality.” The Committee set up a goal, which is “to achieve an on-the-job-training rate to be greater than 90%, and the 50% of employed individuals have to renew their knowledge and improve their skills through receiving continuing education”.

In general, adult continuing education systems carry a heavy load of responsibility and mission in the education industry. Beijing AHEI played essential roles in training applicable talents and improving the quality of local people. The 18 Beijing AHEI paid great attention to continuing education and took the tasks of educating capital citizens as their responsibilities. While formulating annual operational and strategic plans, the colleges always include plans to achieve the goal of creating learning-orientated cities and districts. They focused on developmental strategy of district and industry. By following up with the requirement of Municipal and district, each college established network management systems that contain three layers of schools, including the civilized citizen schools of the city as a top layer, civilized citizen schools of the districts as the primary body, and the civilized citizen schools of community schools as a primary base. This management system built up community education website for the community that then became learning centers of the local people for them to receive continuing education, those people included carders, workers, and residence working at the government and enterprises. The network station/website became a key platform for creating learning-orientated society and life-long learning educational system. Each AHEI took initiatives to visit state government, enterprises, and communities and designed programs to meet with the needs of the people who were from different positions, occupational qualification, and unemployed status to improve citizens’ quality, enrich residences’ cultural life. Some colleges set up research associations and carried out theoretical research on how to build learning-orientated districts, some provided consultation, training, and idea exchange platforms. They published articles about continuing education, edited about a hundred educational and popular science teaching-materials for the communities. These activities played key roles in creating learning-orientated society, and became role models for the entire city. This was especially evidenced during the time while

Beijing was preparing and then hosting the Olympic Game.

In summary, each of Beijing AHEI developed and expanded their scales of programs in the years of 2005, 2006, and 2007, the total number of training projects undertook was 440, 568, and 698 respectively, at an average of 38.8 per college. The total number of the participants/trainees was 133,500, 178,700, and 206,600 individuals/attendances respectively, at an average of 11,500 attendances per college. The individuals who received certificates/licenses/diplomas were 68,800, 92,000, and 155,200 respectively, at an average of 8600 attendances per college. Comparing to the year of 2005, the number of continuing education projects increased 58.6% in 2007, attendance number increased 54.8%, and certificate number increased 125.6%, it is clearly that the continuing education systems were developed very rapidly. Since 2002, Beijing AHEI enhanced international collaboration and exchange programs. Four of the Beijing AHEI initiated JV programs with foreign schools, through those programs, they trained about 4,000 international business sought-after talents for foreign companies, including British Rolls-Royce Group, Lufthansa German Airlines, France Director General Civil Aviation, Swedish Air Traffic Management Bureau, France Airbus, American Boeing Company and GE Corp. Many of the colleges provided foreign language trainings to people who are to go abroad studying and working.

3. Conclusions and considerations

The survey results showed that adult continuing education is one of the indispensable components of the entire educational system; especially while China's higher educational system is still under developing and cannot fully satisfy the people's demands for education. In addition, this component is an essential approach for meeting with increasing needs for receiving education and for improving the quality of people's life. As a key platform, Beijing AHEI therefore became a significant force in promoting the development of life-long learning system, establishing learning-orientated society. By taking their regional and industrial advantages, Beijing AHEI has continued to collaborate with communities and integrate with industry systems. They studied the regular patterns shown in adult education, closely followed up with the developmental trend of the local economy and society, thus to expand educational and teaching reforms and to level up the quality of education and management. This developed system has not only helped meet people's needs to receive education, obtain occupational, college or second degrees, but also to meet their needs to receive on-the-job-skill training or to update knowledge. This research also clearly showed that the roles of Beijing AHEI are essential in many different ways. Such as in a way of developing unique social cultural educational programs to meet with people's needs to improve their own personal quality and to pursue their personal interests. Finally, the key roles of Beijing AHEI played were also seen in helping people maintain healthy spiritual life and improving working skills, further to achieve the goal of being well-rounded developed and being perfected.

By reviewing the components of 900 million population of Chinese labor force, we can clearly tell that the resource of human talents is not to China's advantage, which is evidence by analyzing the (degree) educational level, talent quality, and employment structure. The total quantity, structure and quality of human resources were not able to fully meet with the developmental speed of the economic society. Each year, millions of labor force from the countryside moved to city or switch to non-agriculture industry and now all became city residences. Clearly, we are now facing a great educational development challenge, e.g. how to provide this population with opportunities to receive education, or to improve or update their scientific and technological knowledge and skills, ultimately to make the large population of China be a huge source of human talent pool for the world.

It is now important era as human beings entering into a scientific and technological innovative phase. It has almost become a "must" choice for a country to enhance adult continuing education system for the purposes of constructing an innovative country of China and for executing a human resource strategy to develop the country. This strategy requires an improvement on the quality of continuing education under the new situation that is to thoroughly apply the Scientific Outlook on Development and promote sound and rapid economic and social development. As Chinese adult educators, we should stand at a strategic high position of promoting all-round well-off society, building a harmonious socialist society, and we should take "improving people's quality" as our highest educational goal, thus to implement the government's strategy – "the Scientific Outlook on Development", e.g. "to put people first and aim at comprehensive, coordinated and sustainable development", marching insistently towards the direction of providing services to life-long learning system development. It is important to increase the government budget on adult education system, to enhance theoretical and regulation research on adult continuing education, to bridge the platform of research and communication, and to deepen the reforms of educational management system,

operational mechanism, training model, teaching management, teaching content and methodology, and educational technology and evaluation system etc.. It is essential to perfect the systems including teachers' training programs, evaluation system, as well as incentive approaches, thus to train adult educators according to the plan and to continuously improve teachers' professional ethics, service concepts, and professional quality. It is also critical to level up schools administrative staff's management skills, update their management knowledge, to research and build a secured system integrating higher education institutes, government, and society all together. It is necessary and crucial to pay great attention to train students' practical ability and innovative-creativity, to strengthen collaborations between schools and enterprises and between schools and communities, to explore novel models of training human talents, to provide specialized professional consultation services to students including those psychological counseling, legal assistance, employment training, which should be individualized, and comprehensively. Further, we should continue to explore convergence mechanism for all type of education, in order to establish diversified sharing and cooperation mechanism, promote collaboration and resource sharing among adult higher education institutes, as well as with other education institutes. We should also enhance resource development in ways to create generic and specialized teaching materials for adult education and multi-media tools. Finally, we should learn and reference foreign advanced concepts of continuing education, education model and means, actively introduce foreign advanced educational resources, continue to explore the opportunities to collaborate and exchange with international community colleges, further to develop community continuing education, to carry out community cultural education more specifically. Beijing AHEI will keep working on "providing people's satisfied education" to the communities and continuously play their active serving roles in capital Beijing's constructions of economic, political, cultural, and social systems.

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