

Digital Education of British Universities in the Post-Pandemic Era

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Abstract

After the COVID-19, online education has basically started at all stages of education worldwide. From a global perspective, the mode of applying digital media for education and teaching has become an irreversible educational trend. The degree of digitalization in education in the UK is leading in the world. Taking the digital teaching practices of three universities in the UK as examples, the paper analyzes the digital teaching achievements of UK universities in the post pandemic era and the current development status of digital education in China and the UK, providing reference and reflection for exploring the current digital teaching in Chinese universities.

Keywords

Digital Education, British Universities, Post-Pandemic Era

1. Introduction

The normalization of the epidemic has become a new state of social development, and combining offline and online education is the key to promoting society to continue moving forward. In this context, online education is showing a vigorous development trend, and traditional education is unable to smoothly exert its skills due to geographical limitations. Thinking about how to turn crisis into opportunities, promote the deep and systematic transformation and development of education so as to guide the transformation of education models is a major issue under the trend of digital education.

2. Overview of EU Digital Policy

2.1. Lisbon Strategy

The EU's digital policy can be traced back to the Lisbon Strategy introduced in

2000. Although there were no words such as digitization or data revolution at that time, the Lisbon Strategy was the first 10-year economic development plan of the European Union, focusing on three goals: research investment, economic growth, and employment growth. Specifically, it is to promote the development of innovative knowledge economy by increasing research investment (GDP proportion increase from 1.9% to 3%), and to accelerate economic development (annual economic growth rate increased to 3%) to promote employment growth (from 61% to 70%). As of 2010, there is still some gap between the current development status and the development goals set in the Lisbon Strategy, but the gap between the EU's innovation capability and the United States has further narrowed.

2.2. EU 2020

In 2010, the EU's second ten-year economic development plan, EU 2020 was introduced, proposing the concept of EU digitization, further improving and continuing Lisbon Strategy, with economic innovation, sustainable growth, and competitive advantage as three key areas of development, striving to make Europe a smarter, more sustainable, and more inclusive ideal home. The EU 2020 innovatively proposes eight quantitative indicators covering some major areas, namely employment, education, research and innovation, climate change and energy, poverty, and social exclusion. Based on the comprehensive focus of the Lisbon Strategy, the EU 2020 elaborates on the growth goals of the EU and its member states. Through annual growth surveys (AGS), policy warnings (AMR), national reform procedures (NRP), stability integration plans (SCP), and targeted recommendations, each member state designates corresponding policies according to its own situation to achieve the growth goals (Agasisti & Soncin, 2021). The EU 2020 also proposes seven key measures to boost economic growth, with the first Innovation Alliance and the third European Digital Agenda being the most closely related to digitization. The Innovation Alliance emphasizes improving the policy framework and financing channels for research and innovation, strengthening the innovation industry chain, and increasing the investment level of the entire alliance; the European Digital Agenda emphasizes accelerating the deployment of high-speed internet and establishing a digital single market to create competitive advantages.

2.3. Digital Compass: The Road to a Digital Decade in Europe

In 2021, the European Union released its third ten-year development plan for the digital transformation of digital sovereignty and the construction of a people-oriented and sustainable digital society by 2030- the 2030 Digital Compass: European Digital Decade Road plan. Propose ideas from four aspects: digital education and cultivating a large number of highly professional digital talents, building a safe, high-performance, and sustainable digital infrastructure, committed to digital transformation of enterprises, and vigorously promoting the digitization of public services.

3. Development of Digitalization in British Universities

Before Brexit, the UK was one of the important member states of the European Union. Therefore, after the proposal of the EU's digital strategy, the UK began to carry out digital construction. Therefore, the UK became the earliest country in the European region to carry out information and communication technology education. The UK also took advantage of this opportunity to rapidly develop the digital industry, developed advanced digital technology and resources, and its digital level is leading globally. The digitalization process in the UK is driven by the EU's digitalization strategy, focusing on its own strategic advantages, with a focus on promoting the improvement of national living standards and economic growth through productivity changes, and promoting the transformation of various industries across the country towards digitalization. On this basis, the British government also attaches great importance to the role of information and communication technology in education, and has made the following series of plans in the past two decades.

So far, various policy plans for the development of digital education in the UK have made some requirements for teachers, teaching infrastructure, and students to achieve modernization of the education system. The indispensable factor in the education process is teachers, therefore, in the digital education process, teachers are required to possess ICT technology and teaching abilities, as well as educational information technology commonly used in the education and teaching process; regarding teaching infrastructure, it is necessary to build an information-based educational infrastructure and platform, widely share digital resources, break the limitations of classrooms and disciplines, provide learning tools and resources for learners, and meet their personalized development needs (Rapanta et al., 2020). There are also higher requirements for the learning ability of student groups, requiring students to receive high-quality education and improve their knowledge and ability structure.

4. Current Situation of Digital Development in British Universities

Despite the ongoing instability of the epidemic, offline teaching is gradually being restored within British universities. However, almost all schools still maintain the online teaching track and implement a blended teaching model. This teaching method not only ensures the quality of face-to-face teaching, but also allows students to receive support from online resources (Marcelo, 2021). In order to provide students with safe and high-quality teaching services, most courses have resumed normal offline teaching. Most seminars, group teaching and research, practice, guidance, laboratory and other practical work, rehearsals and internships are held offline, and even include some lectures. In addition, some student club activities, welcome week activities and introductions, sports, cultural exchanges, etc. are allowed to be conducted offline.

In the long-term prevention and control of the epidemic, people have gradu-

ally adapted to online education, and it is not feasible for schools to continue teaching completely according to traditional teaching models. Of course, although online education can provide more learning resources and provide more choices for students' diverse learning needs, it should also be noted that online education cannot fully meet the learning needs of students. Therefore, traditional offline teaching models are still needed. However, it cannot be ignored that traditional offline education has high labor costs and relatively limited educational resources. During the pandemic, British universities shifted courses that were not limited by experimental conditions to online and implemented a comprehensive online teaching model; although some specific experimental parts that require experimentation can be achieved through simulation calculations using computer networks, these are only a part of it, and most experiments still require the use of offline practical operations. So, the existing teaching mode is mainly a hybrid model of online education and offline education. This model complements traditional teaching and online education, solves the shortcomings of traditional teaching while fully leveraging the advantages of online education. The combination of the two promotes the further transformation and upgrading of digital education.

5. Application of Digital Education in British Universities and Its Implications

The experience of carrying out online teaching models can be borrowed from each other. The epidemic has seriously affected education and teaching models, and the reintegration and allocation of educational resources to create digital education has become a new development trend in global education.

5.1. Developing and Improving Digital Education System

Under the influence of the epidemic, traditional classroom teaching has been forced to shift to online education, but traditional offline education still has advantages that cannot be replaced by online education. A single online education affects the mutual experience of teaching and learning between teachers and students. The blended teaching model combines the educational advantages of traditional teaching and online education, and is a widely used teaching model. However, the digital education model of universities is not just a hybrid education model. With the development of digital application technology, the education model is also completely transferred online based on the curriculum and students' situation, transferring courses that are not limited by experimental conditions to online; engineering courses also have online virtual simulation teaching, which can display the experimental status through computer simulation software. It can be said that online education is a major trend in the development of information technology. Nowadays, there has been a widespread use of digital technology to enrich educational resources and improve teaching quality. Therefore, it is more important to take the initiative to develop and improve

digital education, explore the combination mode of online education and traditional education, apply digital technology to education and teaching, and promote the transformation and development of educational mechanisms.

5.2. Building Digital Platform

Education needs a certain carrier, and the application of digital education also needs to rely on a certain digital platform. China's education should follow the historical trend of social development and develop towards digitization and intelligence. Digital resources have become an important content carried by digital platforms, building the infrastructure required for digitization, such as overcoming obstacles to wireless communication networks and mobile devices, and widely using Coursera, EdX Online teaching digital platforms such as Future-Learn and Moodle access learning resources. In the EU's digital strategy, emphasis is placed on secure, high-performance, and sustainable digital infrastructure. The UK's digital development plan also emphasizes the use of information technology. Therefore, it is necessary to develop and improve information networks, build digital education platforms, and utilize digital information resources to create a digital carrier platform with widespread digital technology applications and high development of the digital industry.

5.3. Cultivating Digital Talents

The EU's digital strategy for 2030 mentions the need to have a large number of highly professional digital talents. Talents are crucial for achieving digital transformation, and a professional talent team is an important condition for the national digital strategy. In the early 21st century, the UK revised the national curriculum standards, highlighting the importance of information technology application. While establishing a professional team of teachers who use information technology for education and teaching, it also enhances the information technology application ability of the entire population through education and popularizes information technology. China can fully learn from the UK's approach to popularizing digitalization, establish professional talent teams in different industries, and carry out relevant professional training programs; in basic education, we should carry out modern information education courses, popularize information technology, improve the popularity of digital information technology, and enable the entire society to use digital media networks to truly benefit from the convenience of information network life. The protection of digital security and personal privacy is an important prerequisite for the widespread acceptance and support of the use of digital network media, and is an important condition for achieving modern digital education.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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