

## Strategic Positioning of Occupation Education in Colleges and Universities: Orienting to Open and Distance Education

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**Abstract:** In order to study the causes of unclear strategic positioning of occupation education of colleges and universities in China, we analyze the changes occurred in last quarter caused change in the structure and function of occupation education in colleges and universities in china. In study, rapid developments in computational technology have created opportunities for new implementations in both face to face education and on-line learning as one from of distance education. For this purpose, developments in occupation education and communication technologies have increasingly gained ground in colleges and universities “open” and “distance” education, both of which are based on the internet. “Distance education applications” through the internet make up for a new economic learning dynamic based on rigorous occupation education by which it is available to students to benefit virtually from occupation education in any other country without needing to live abroad. Colleges and Universities are particularly supposed to lead the innovation process in occupation education fields. In this sense, we hope that strategic positioning of occupation education of colleges and universities in china can drive “open” and “distance” education and more importantly to be a “pioneer” in such applications.

**Keywords:** Colleges and universities, distance education, occupation education, strategic positioning

### INTRODUCTION

Over the twenty years through 2014, The open and distance education has been practiced in china which has aroused more interest as a result of newly developing and expanding internet technologies. Further, newly evolving electronic facilities such as video-conference systems, computer and internet technologies offer considerable opportunities to instructors and learners of occupation education in colleges and universities (Burge, 1992). Colleges and universities in the US have also considered ways so as to lessen their costs, close some departments, programs or institutions, as well as measuring of performance the occupation education staff, loading extra responsibilities onto them. On the other hand, globalization offers a number of opportunities. Students and academicians in colleges and universities are now likely to reach global opportunities via internet access. Great changes just at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century have also opened up new occupation education technologies such as computerization, communication and multimedia. Meanwhile, globalization is the greatest challenge to colleges and universities and has brought many threats together (Shale, 1988).

The open and distance education has proved to be a contemporary model of free of time and space which

offers free and individual occupation education service through leading communication technologies such as internet. The open and distance education program is a dimension of contemporary and new education technologies. Concepts and applications in this field are the results of a series of occupation educational demands and developments in various communication and occupation education technologies (Burge and Lensky, 1990). The open and distance education applications have some conceptual bases. These are creating new occupation education opportunities, realizing work-education unity, getting democratic in occupation education lifelong occupation education, tendency to individual matters, effective use of institutions, integration of technology and occupation education, tendency to individual and social needs, taking three dimensional integration as the main principle (publishing, printed materials and face to face education), reaching maximum mass, individual and mass occupation education integrity and occupation education demand and financial matters balance. Actually, the origin of “distance education” dates back to the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, certain institutions in both the USA and the UK had already established the infrastructure of the occupation education service based on mutual correspondence (Clark, 1990). Today, The open and distance education service undoubtedly has

made it available to individuals to benefit from formal occupation education service in their own locations by attending the courses of formal occupation education out of the borders of distance education. In addition to such opportunities, we could also count electronic data bases, books, journals and papers, website applications and basic use of intermediate applications that make it available to students and educators to readily reach the classroom activities. occupation education in colleges and universities have turned today to The open and distance education service in order to meet ever-changing needs of students. In 21<sup>th</sup> century, various e-learning services such as e-Book, e-Audio Book, e-Facilitation, e-Support, e-Practice, e-Television, e-Papers, e-Journals, e-Thesis, e-Course and e-Exam were designed and put into practice (Garrison, 1990).

Finally, the open and distance education applications are the most developed forms of today's distance education applications for strategic positioning of occupation education in colleges and universities. With the development of web technologies, lecture contents are diversified, flexible occupation education independent of time and place is achieved in china. Perhaps, knowledge of students in internet-based distance education process mostly tends to be permanent. While considered that technologic innovations reign today at such a fast rhythm, we would readily Predict that further innovations are on the way in near future. Therefore, we hope that strategic positioning of occupation education of colleges and universities in china can drive "open" and "distance" education and more importantly to be a "pioneer" in such applications.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

Nowadays, occupation education system in general sense is exposed to considerable pressure from frequent criticism due to its disability in meeting the requirements of economies based on pure knowledge in china. In the process, demands of the market economy have changed at an amazing pace along with the administrative institutions established to meet regional and national demands. As a result, students who are afraid of being unemployed prefer to graduate from colleges and universities which will make obtaining job easier and so such colleges and universities have been exposed to gradually increasing pressure of capacity. Furthermore, economic difficulties and students' additional fee which colleges and universities charge along with the pressure of having to live another city

and high cost of metropolitan life are likely to mean extra burden on students' budgets. At the same time, crowded classrooms, inefficient and routine courses, little by little increasing costs and insufficient number of occupation education staff have forced authorities to find out new alternatives so as to meet the ever-increasing demand (Rekkedal, 1993). Today, colleges and universities in china have always tried new alternatives, some of which are open training, distant training (by letters), distance education, e-learning, online learning, learning on web database, distributed learning, simultaneous learning, tele-learning and flexible learning. However, in recent years, new tendencies in occupation education have driven universities to make use of electronic facilities and internet technology and this makes almost inevitable to offer their students on-line services (Kirkup and Prümmer, 1990). Therefore, while strategic positioning of occupation education in colleges and universities in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, felt themselves obliged to establish virtual campuses occupation education in addition to their traditional campuses occupation education in china (Fig. 1).

Undoubtedly, today's china is exposed to rapid changes and ever-changing conditions bring a great many of reforms and innovations together. Such domestic and international changes and innovations have inevitably affected almost all colleges and universities in china. Political, social, economic and technologic changes which have notably gained driving force from the end of the 20th century on have increasingly continued in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Rumble, 1992). In making strategic positioning, the most crucial step is the performance of "SWOT matrix analysis" referring to: (S) Strengths (Strength aspects of the internal), (W) Weaknesses (weak aspects of the internal), (O) Opportunities (the external opportunities which the organization obtains), (T) Threats (the external threats and dangers which the organization faces). SWOT matrix (Table 1) analysis makes up an analysis as to internal and external factors because any organization must be aware of the changes and developments in their internal and external environment.

**Opportunities and threats in the external environment of colleges and universities:** Obtaining remarkable success in china which is exposed to non-stop winds of change in economic, socio-cultural and technological respects, as well as newly appearing performance criteria, colleges and universities are

Table 1: SWOT matrix analysis of strategic positioning of occupation education in colleges and universities

External/Internal	Strengths (S)	Weaknesses (w)
Opportunities (O)	SO strategic positioning of occupation education in colleges and universities	WO strategic positioning of occupation education in colleges and universities
Threats (T)	ST strategic positioning of occupation education in colleges and universities	WT strategic positioning of occupation education in colleges and universities

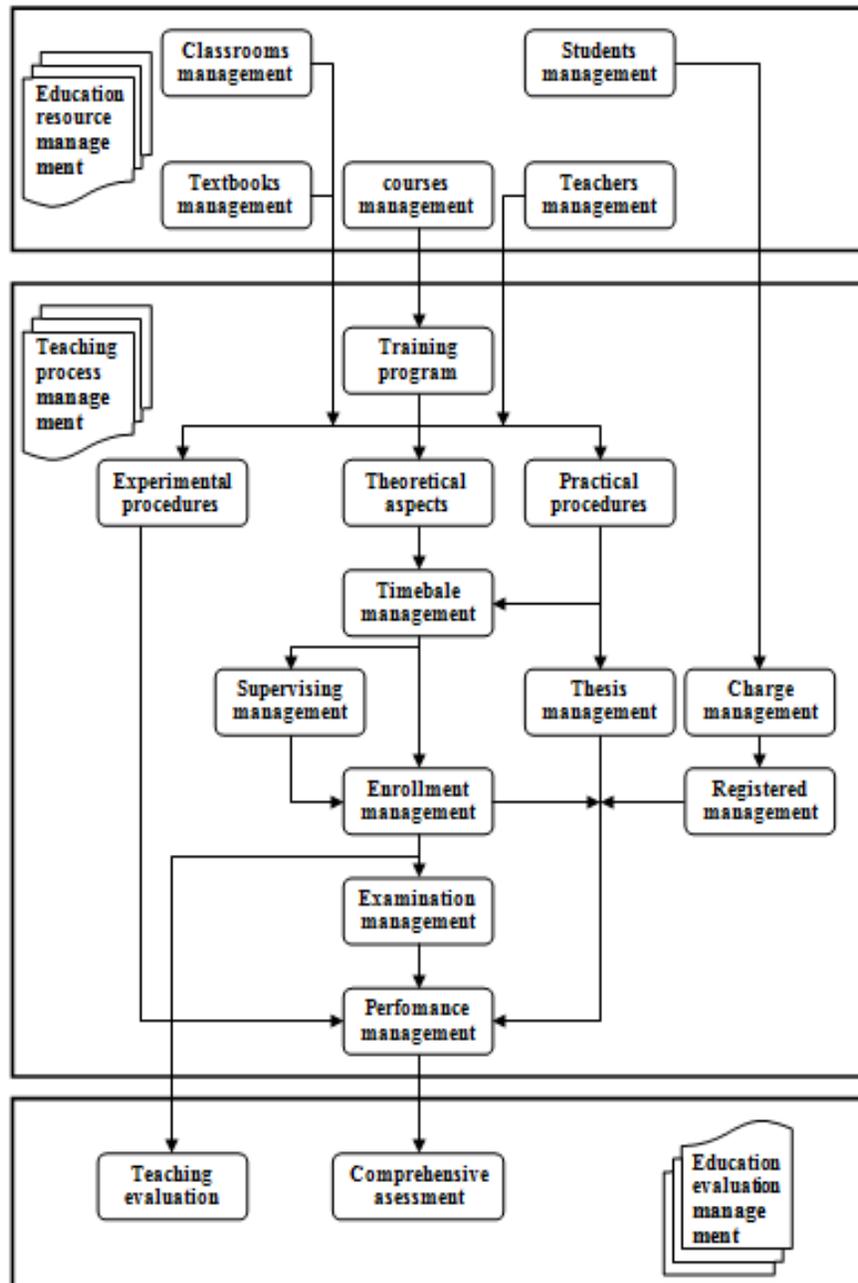


Fig. 1: Functional flow-process of traditional campuses occupation education management

supposed to develop new strategic positioning which will provide them the maximum advantage possible, taking their weak and powerful sides. Today, this point is undoubtedly of critical importance for many colleges and universities which are in jeopardy. At this point, colleges and universities should be familiar with into their own bodies so as to strategic vitality of opportunities and threats in the external environment and adopt it come up with new strategic positioning in addition to using their sources and capacities at highest level possible by performing rigorous and systematic analysis. Opportunities and threats in the external

environment, therefore, consist of a comprehensive study of positive and negative factors thriving in the external environmental factors.

As a result, we could conclude that globalization is of great threats on occupation education ranging from ever-lessening budgets allocated to occupation education service, we wish for benefiting from opportunities, training with technologic support, gradually increased volume of student market on global based and newly appearing challenges and opportunities. At the same time, among major factors compelling the colleges and universities to changes/

innovations are financial challenges needs of the changing society as well as threats of the market (Rekkedal, 1993). To obtain a considerable status, almost each new university has aspired new titles such as the colleges and universities of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In such an external competitive environment, it seems hardly inevitable for colleges and universities to presume any outer opportunity and threat so as to develop SO strategic positioning of occupation education in colleges and universities.

**Strengths and weaknesses in the internal environment of colleges and universities:** An “internal analysis” is performed to put forward both weak and powerful sides. At this stage, colleges and universities are exposed to “self-criticism” in terms of sources (input), current strategic positioning and so-far performance (output). As a result, such self-respect will allow colleges and universities get through a process of “inner analysis” so as comprehend the position of the colleges and universities compared with other colleges and universities as well as imminent strengths and weaknesses in the future. It should be noted that colleges and universities fail to perceive in time such inner weaknesses, developments and as a result because they couldn’t make up required strategic positioning in time, they mostly tend to close themselves to innovations, falling in a feeling of relief. Such a risk is notably much more serious even for many colleges and universities which enjoyed great success in the past (Sewart, 1980).

As a result, colleges and universities have undergone an unprecedented innovation process which cannot be considered as not only the simultaneous results of efforts to reach more inner functional system in china’s occupation education, but also the inner strengths and weaknesses based on pure technology which could afford to affect all teachers and students in colleges and universities. Such a case could probably be caused by the inner coincidence of technologic abilities leading to changes. Therefore, occupation education has also gradually been a global field, leaving its old traditional concepts native to countries. Thus, occupation education system of developed nations has increasingly been exposed to a constant flux of students, due to ever-increasing demand from developing countries. In occupation education of colleges and universities, various e-learning services such as e-Book, e-Audio Book, e-Facilitation, e-Support, e-Practice, e-Television, e-Papers, e-Journals, e-Course and e-Exam were perceived in time such inner weaknesses (Wittington, 1987). On the other hand, developments in information technologies in china have evolved a novel situation in domestic occupation education which is completely free of student circulation. In such an internal competitive environment, it seems hardly inevitable for colleges and

universities to presume any inner strength and weakness so as to develop WO strategic positioning of occupation education in colleges and universities (White and Taylor, 1983).

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Today, occupation education in colleges and universities has largely been considered so far to be a public service whose expenditures are met thoroughly by public sources, apart from a handful of countries including the US. However, due to the gradually increasing demand in occupation education in recent and following years, the maintenance of occupation education only through public sources has been seriously argued. In that way, new attempts have been almost inevitable to meet expenses of occupation education service through other sources as well as public sources, to vary income sources of occupation education institutions, more efficient and even distribution and use of public sources (Taylor and White, 1991). Therefore, education expenses which accounts for the most important rate (70-80%) of occupation education budgets due to additional fees for individuals who gets this service and considerable social income of such a service, the society has gradually held the opinion that education expenses which accounts for the most important rate (70-80%) of occupation education budgets should be financed by the national support which all the society is supposed to pay. As in occupation education field, universities have been gradually exposed to get financial sources out of public ones. In other words, instead of obtaining knowledge for public benefit with public support, the open and distance education should be supported heavily for orienting of occupation education strategic positioning in colleges and universities.

**The function of the open and distance education system at occupation education of colleges and universities:** Major functions program of the open and distance education system at occupation education of colleges and universities (Fig. 2) are allowing individuals to build up a novel concept about teachers and students, various e-learning services such as e-Book, e-Audio Book, e-Facilitation, e-Homework, e-Practice, e-Experiment, e-Television, e-Papers, e-Journals, e-Learning questions and answers, e-Course evaluation information, e-Thesis, e-Tutor, e-Course and e-Exam were perceived in time (Wittington, 1987). As a result, the aim of the distance education is “science for science”.

**Strategic positioning results of the applications in open and distance education at occupation education of colleges and universities:**

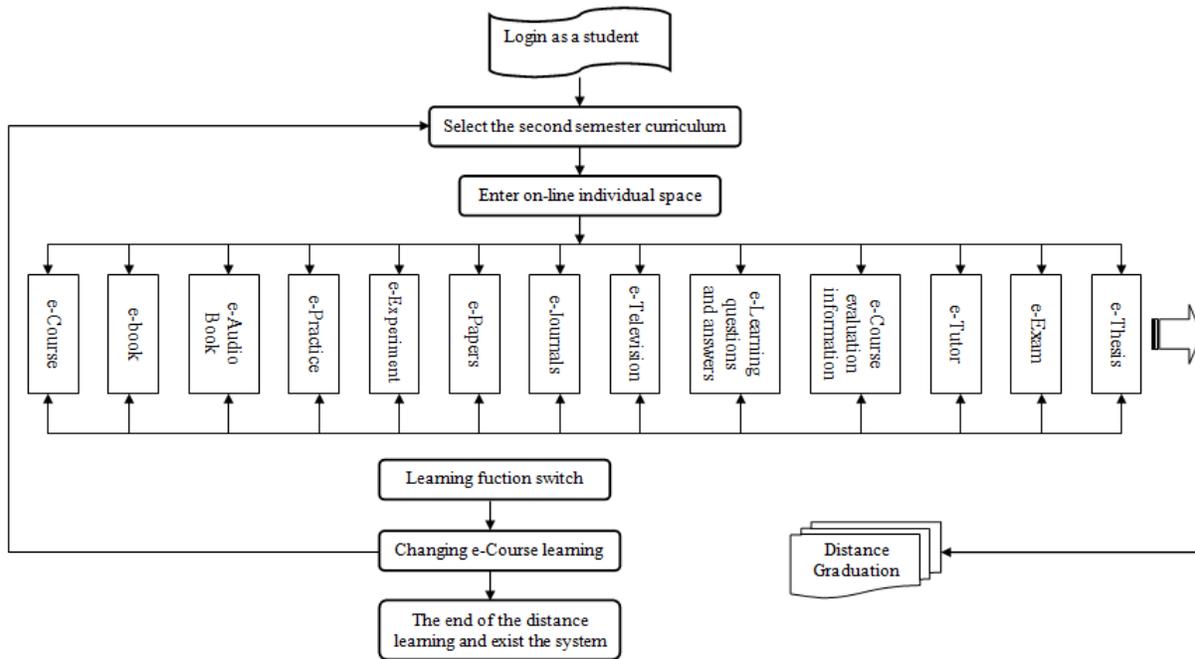


Fig. 2: Major functions program of the open and distance education system at occupation education of colleges and universities

**Positive strategic positioning results:** In five aspects, resulting from open and distance education applications in colleges and universities in china: First, colleges and universities have gradually turned out to be virtual education. Virtual education, on one hand, benefit from a great many applications in occupation education period (White and Taylor, 1983). On the other hand, it use varied new concepts such as blended education, unsynchronized distance education, on-line learning, web-based distance education, whole-life learning, mobile learning and virtual education. The major object will establish a large net in global sense of potential students, education elements and graduates. Second, distance education has little by little been operated new technologies based on internet. Considered in this respect, it could be assumed that the major object in distance education is, by using different means from traditional education methods, to meet the ever-increasing global demand for occupation education. Third, on-line training has now been available. Students could now efficiently benefit from on-line training facilities by which e-learning and distance education service opportunities has inevitably resulted in globalization of occupation education by using virtual education without needing to leave a city or a country. Forth, the student profile has gradually been internationalized. More and more students from different countries register their names on-line for training. Fifth, occupation education costs are gradually declining. Because all the services for students are available faster, more efficient and at lower cost, distance education is the cheapest one of all other education systems.

**Negative strategic positioning results:** In five aspects, resulting from universities' orienting to open and distance education in china: First, upon the increasing importance of university degree and certificates, a fierce competition has nearly become inevitable between universities and the institutions which deliver these certificates and as a result, certain institutions have nearly regarded such certificates of private bodies as sufficient to gain professional career, which has made these private agents considerable competitors of colleges and universities. Meanwhile, seeking themselves as a commercial body, colleges and universities have also been in order to obtain financial resource. Nevertheless, over time, such a trend is likely to bring about "colleges and universities to be drained". Second, colleges and universities could also turn into be instutions that merely deal with "education and training" process. Colleges and universities also have some other critical responsibilities such as "research" and "social service". Third, the mentality of a university based on "client-market" could turn to be ermanent. and so colleges and universities are gradually turning into an attraction center as a "profiting body" (Shale, 1988). In this respect, colleges and universities are expected to work for new technologies, making contribution to national and universal culture, as well as taking some respects and point of views into consideration such as leading in the society. Forth, academic staff and students could be considered as only a material in occupation education. Academic staff is today regarded as a commercial material to attract more students to colleges and universities, while the students are supposed to be an object that could access learning materials through using names or codes, without using

interactive methods and social environment which are heavily based on. Fifth, colleges and universities have little by little lost their autonomy given as a right. Colleges and universities could be observed closely and strictly in academic, financial and administrative terms, even including censor as a means or tool of strict control.

### **CONCLUSION**

Undoubtedly, globalization has tended to turn colleges and universities into customer-centered companies that are driven in a bureaucratic way whereby these colleges and universities are gradually forced to take more enterprising steps in any field. In other words, it seems now inevitable that colleges and universities as occupation education institutions should keep pace with the innovations in national and international educations as well as social, political and technologic changes. Of all such reforms and innovations, colleges and universities are particularly supposed to manage and lead the innovation process in occupation education, science and technology fields. For colleges and universities to drive changes in "open" and "distance" education program and to introduce the strides they are supposed to, colleges and universities must, by seeing the future from today, take precautions, develop strategic positioning and then put them into practice in a short time. Otherwise, it seems inevitable that colleges and universities in china will become an "ordinary body" in occupation education service. In this sense, we hope that strategic positioning of occupation education of colleges and universities in china can drive "open" and "distance" education and more importantly to be a "pioneer" in such applications.

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