

Research on Strategies for the Construction of Community Education Quality Evaluation System in China



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Abstract: Community education aims to improve the quality of life of citizens in a country. It is considered to be an important part of lifelong education. In China, community education has been seen as a key means of enhancing national quality and fostering social harmony to meet the increasing demands of the economy and society's rapid development. The paper first sets the scenario addressing the definition of community education quality and its connotation and then explores the strategies for quality and systemic evaluation of community education in practice. Lastly, the paper analyses the challenges and opportunities for community education by proposing the prospective future of community education evaluation.

Keywords: community education; quality evaluation; construction of evaluation system; challenges and opportunities

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Community education (CE) is an educational activity that aims to improve the quality of life of its members comprehensively. It is an important part of the lifelong education system and offers all community members comprehensive and all-around educational guidance services (Wang, 2024). Regarding individuals, they are assimilated into group dynamics, and their socialized education can successfully support the growth of social class mobility across generations as well as social justice, inclusivity, and sustainable development (Zhao & Liu, 2024; Fu & Zhang, 2024). CE has been seen as a key means of enhancing national quality and fostering social harmony, and residents' demand for lifelong education has grown more pressing as a result of the economy and society's rapid development.

1.2 Government policies and initiatives

In 2014, the Ministry of Education and seven other departments issued the Opinions on Promoting the Construction of Learning Cities; and in 2016, nine ministries, including the Ministry of Education, once again issued the Opinions on Further Promoting the Development of Community Education. These

authorities suggested that in order to form a large number of learning cities with a perfect lifelong education system, coordinated development of all kinds of education at all levels, open and diverse learning opportunities, and rich and shared learning resources, they should establish a sound statistical information system for lifelong learning and develop a monitoring and evaluation index system and encourage the development of civil learning communities. To achieve the initial formation of a CE governance system, a richer content form, and a CE development model with Chinese characteristics, it is crucial to improve the supervision and evaluation mechanism and formulate evaluation standards for community education. The General Office of the State Council released the "Development Plan for Elderly Education (2016-2020)" in 2016. This plan identified expanding the supply of educational resources for the elderly as one of its main tasks and proposed to prioritize the development of elderly education in urban and rural communities as well as to enhance the elderly education service system at the grassroots community level. These initiatives offer implementation paths and policy guidelines for the growth of CE. With the successive release of these policy documents, China's social education has established its strategic place in the

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country's educational, economic and social development. It also establishes the groundwork for the development of a reasonable and scientific quality evaluation index system. The efficiency of educational services and the rationality of the distribution of educational resources can both be enhanced by the implementation of a strong system for evaluating the quality of CE.

1.3 The research objective

As Chinese-style modernization intensifies, many practical issues and challenges currently face CE, a crucial means of improving the nation's quality and fostering social harmony. Even though there is a clear theoretical and policy framework for the development of high-quality CE, in reality, the uneven development of CE, dysfunction brought on by structural imbalance, and the rough and inequitable quality of education remain significant obstacles to its healthy growth. These factors also indirectly contribute to the misallocation of educational resources, which makes it impossible to meet the residents' increasingly varied needs.

In order to coordinate the effectiveness, public interest, and equity of CE services, a sound system of corresponding quality evaluation indicators must be established immediately. Additionally, based on successful international experience, we must further sort out the meaning, traits, and value orientation of CE quality to investigate a system for evaluating CE quality that is appropriate for China's national circumstances and to offer a workable foundation for the actual improvement of CE quality.

2. The Definition and Dimensions of CE Quality

What is meant by "quality" is "the degree of superiority or inferiority (Xia & Chen, 2010)." It describes the standard by which something is evaluated concerning other similar things; it is the degree of excellence of something; the level of excellence of an object (Oxford, 2013). Therefore, it is common to define quality as an intrinsic attribute of a particular entity that is value-neutral (Ma, 2014). Many different viewpoints, dimensions, and values go into defining quality in education, and it also takes into account historical and cultural factors (Ryzhov et al., 2021). "An assessment of the level and effectiveness of education" and "ultimately the quality of the people it produces" are the two most common definitions of educational quality when considering the results and accomplishments of education (Gu, 1990).

What is meant by "CE" is "to develop and make use of all kinds of educational resources in the community, and to carry out educational activities aimed at improving the quality of members' qualities and the quality of their lives, and to promote the all-round development of members and the sustainable development of the community (PRC 2007)". As China's modernization process picks up speed, the lifelong learning system's boundaries are being expanded more and more. This not only expands the range of CE services but also innovates the way CE is developed and establishes a new environment for its high-quality growth. With the greatest number and variety of teachers, the broadest scope of learning goals and subjects, and the most varied forms and patterns, CE is the most prevalent form of education worldwide. As such, its meaning is continuously expanded (Cui & Wu, 2024). Broadly defined, CE represents social education within a community context, enriching residents' spiritual and cultural lives, improving their skills and quality of life. This includes vocational training, specialized education for groups like farmers, the elderly, women, children, and individuals with disabilities, as well as community culture and life education (Gao & Wang, 2022). With the community serving as the fundamental unit of activity, CE can be narrowly defined as a set of learning support services aimed at meeting the diverse needs of the populace. By integrating all available resources, it is possible to give both urban and rural residents more balanced and superior learning environments while also satisfying their needs for rich and high-quality education. Here, CE is a high-quality, practical program that is based on CE institutions, primarily community colleges, community schools, and community learning centers. Its educational goal is to raise the standard of living for those who live in the community, and promote the sustainable development of the community. Based on this, the quality of community education is fundamentally centered on meeting the diverse learning needs of community residents while also addressing the practical requirements of social development. Currently, its key characteristics include supporting the development of a learning society and the establishment of learning organizations, encompassing the achievement of educational goals, effectiveness of educational processes, rational allocation of educational resources, equity of educational services, and the completeness of quality

assurance mechanisms.

3. Value Orientations Theory of CE Quality Evaluation

The concept of "promoting the harmonious development of community construction, promoting the development of CE, and promoting the comprehensive improvement of the quality of community residents" (Zhou et al., 2008) should serve as the theoretical foundation for conducting diagnostic factual evaluations and differential value judgments. Value orientation also plays a crucial guiding and regulating role in the supply and development of CE, which should reflect a pluralistic value orientation in attending to residents' demands and serving people's livelihood concerns, including the enhancement of the value of human vitality (He, 2023). This means that, while acknowledging the quality connotation of CE evaluation, the importance of timeliness and practicality must be balanced for the evaluation indicators of CE to reflect the needs of the public (Zhou & Wang, 2023). This is particularly evident in the development of the evaluation system of "subject participation, spiral improvement," as well as the three categories of quality, effect, and scope of the value of behavior in the same frequency (Wei & Fang, 2022). However, there are currently limitations regarding the evaluation agent, evaluation method, and evaluation purpose, making it challenging to reflect the actual perception of the quality of CE in practice (Wang & Song, 2014). Additionally, it is still challenging to replace the government-led supervision and evaluation of CE with a diversified evaluation of CE (Wu, 2021). Evaluation of diverse CE remains the standard practice. Despite the apparent diversity of the implementation subjects, the evaluation's homogeneity results in homogenized evaluation behavior and outcomes. Under the social-based value orientation, it is portrayed as "administrative" and "school-based" evaluations of safeguard conditions (Wu, 2020).

Therefore, in the process of Chinese-style modernization, at least two values should be emphasized when assessing the quality of community education: first, the value of human-centeredness for all. As stated in the UNESCO (2014) EFA Global Monitoring Report, and "ensure that everyone can learn well and achieve recognized and measurable learning outcomes in reading, writing, numeracy and basic life skills". Second, the social value orientation

of justice and inclusion. Currently, the education system is facing several crises in terms of fairness and inclusion, educational quality and relevance of interactive impact, as well as superimposed resonance (UN, 2023). The assessment of the quality of CE should take into account the different needs of different stakeholders and make the provision of equal learning opportunities for the residents of the community, serving the entire population for lifelong learning.

4. Core Elements of CE Quality Evaluation System

An important guarantee for the high-quality development of CE is the establishment of a sound evaluation system for CE quality, the improvement of educational services' effectiveness, the fair distribution of educational resources, and the improvement of residents' sense of access and well-being. However, the ambiguity of indicators poses a significant challenge, making it difficult for stakeholders to agree on what constitutes a good CE paradigm. This is due to the objective reasons of the wide range of CE service targets and the complexity of the implementation method itself. The evaluation dimension of CE resource quality focuses on several key aspects, including the rate of resource matching and integration, the capacity to coordinate different types of educational resources in the area, the planning of regional community courses, the coordination of all parties' participation in building CE teaching bases, and the coordination of the teaching force to support the execution of local CE initiatives. Furthermore, the evaluation dimension of CE process quality should express the integration of teachers' instruction and students' learning values, encompassing a thorough assessment of various educational elements. By addressing these aspects, the evaluation system can provide a comprehensive understanding of CE quality, ultimately contributing to its high-quality development.

5. The Prospective of Community Education Evaluation in China: A Transformative Vision

CE in China is at a pivotal moment, on the cusp of a significant transformation that mirrors the country's swift social, technological, and economic advancements. With the acceleration of China's modernization process, the assessment of CE programs has become crucial to guarantee their efficacy and pertinence.

5.1 Some emerging trends in CE

The future of CE in China will be fundamentally reshaped by technological innovation. Artificial intelligence, virtual reality, and advanced digital platforms will revolutionize learning methodologies and educational mechanisms (Zhu et al., 2018), making education more accessible, personalized, and interactive, breaking down traditional barriers to learning.

To achieve this, CE will focus on providing upskilling programs for rural populations, increasing educational opportunities for migrant workers in urban areas, strengthening urban-rural educational integration, and empowering marginalized communities through accessible learning resources. The future model of CE will extend beyond traditional academic learning, featuring an adaptive and responsive curriculum that incorporates dynamically designed micro-curricula (Ding & Liu, 2018). These emerging CE models will be capable of rapidly responding to technological advancements, labor market requirements, global economic trends, and local community needs, ultimately fostering a more inclusive and equitable society.

5.2 Challenges

CE has emerged as a significant focus and achieved substantial progress in China in recent years; however, several challenges persist:

First, the digital divide presents a significant challenge, particularly in rural and disadvantaged areas where access to digital learning resources remains limited (Peng et al., 2024) and internet connectivity is insufficient, despite the widespread adoption of online education in urban settings. The associated costs of digital infrastructure and devices further exacerbate this disparity.

Second, ensuring equitable access to educational resources and establishing mechanisms for optimized resource allocation across regions, particularly for marginalized communities, remains a pressing concern. This challenge encompasses both physical and digital resources, as well as the need for qualified instructors and support services.

Third, there exists a complex challenge in balancing standardized curricula and assessment frameworks with the importance of local contextualization and adaptability. This tension between standardization and localization requires careful consideration to maintain educational quality while addressing specific community needs.

Fourth, the diverse and decentralized nature of

CE programs in China complicates the development of a standardized evaluation framework applicable across various regions and programs. Consequently, maintaining uniform educational quality across different regions and programs presents a significant challenge, particularly within the context of rapid expansion and decentralization of educational services.

5.3 Opportunities

These challenges and threats in CE indeed present significant opportunities for educators, stakeholders, and practitioners across multiple dimensions:

First, governmental support has become increasingly robust, with Chinese authorities emphasizing the importance of CE in recent years. This commitment has created opportunities for enhanced funding allocation and resource development for evaluation systems, potentially leading to more comprehensive and effective CE programs.

Second, China's advanced digital infrastructure presents a unique opportunity for CE to leverage online learning approaches (Song, 2022). This technological foundation enables the creation of flexible, modular learning pathways that can accommodate diverse learner needs while promoting lifelong learning and skill development. The widespread adoption of technology facilitates the development of sophisticated online evaluation tools and platforms, thereby enhancing both efficiency and accessibility of educational resources.

Third, the emphasis on community engagement and participation in education represents a valuable opportunity to increase local ownership, relevance, and impact. By actively involving community members in educational planning and implementation, CE programs can become more responsive to local needs and priorities, ensuring sustainable and meaningful educational outcomes. This participatory approach helps create a more dynamic and inclusive educational ecosystem that better serves the diverse needs of different communities.

5.4 Strategies for improvement

By addressing these challenges and opportunities, the following strategies are proposed: Developing context-specific evaluation frameworks, that is, evaluation frameworks should be tailored to the specific needs and contexts of CE programs in China, aims to achieve both the uniformity and

standardization of the evaluation process while reflecting the distinctive characteristics of regional development; Investing in Digital Infrastructure: Targeted investments in digital infrastructure, particularly in rural and disadvantaged areas, can help bridge the digital divide and increase access to educational resources. Leveraging technology can improve the efficiency and effectiveness of evaluation, for instance, by utilizing online surveys, data tracking, and intelligent analytics technologies; Encouraging participatory evaluation: Involving community members, practitioners, and stakeholders in the evaluation process can increase ownership and ensure that evaluation findings are relevant and actionable.

By acknowledging and addressing the challenges and leveraging the opportunities, CE in China can harness the potential of technological innovation, curriculum reform, and community engagement to promote inclusive, equitable, and high-quality education for all and develop a robust and effective evaluation system that supports the development of CE programs and contributes to the country's lifelong education goals.

6. Conclusion

The future of CE in China represents a transformative journey towards a more inclusive, adaptive, and technologically empowered learning landscape. By embracing innovation, prioritizing accessibility, and fostering a culture of continuous learning, China can develop a CE model that meets contemporary challenges and anticipates future societal needs. The vision extends beyond educational advancement—it is fundamentally about creating resilient, knowledgeable, and interconnected communities that can navigate the complexities of changing times through the enhancement of quality sustainability.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares that she has no conflicts of interest to this work.

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